The Paroxetine 352 Bipolar Study Revisited: Deconstruction of Corporate and Academic Misconduct

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**Abstract**

Medical ghostwriting is the practice in which pharmaceutical companies engage an outside writer to draft a manuscript submitted for publication in the names of “honorary authors,” typically academic key opinion leaders. Using newly-posted documents from paroxetine litigation, we show how the use of ghostwriters and key opinion leaders contributed to the publication of a medical journal article containing manipulated outcome data to favor the proprietary medication. The article was ghostwritten and managed by SmithKline Beecham, now GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Scientific Therapeutics Information, Inc. without acknowledging their contribution in the published article. The named authors with financial ties to GSK, had little or no direct involvement in the paroxetine 352 bipolar trial results and most had not reviewed any of the manuscript drafts. The manuscript was originally rejected by peer review; however, its ultimate acceptance to the *American Journal of Psychiatry* was facilitated by the journal editor who also had financial ties to GSK. Thus, GSK was able to take an under-powered and non-informative trial with negative results and present it as a positive marketing vehicle for off-label promotion of paroxetine for bipolar depression. In addition to the commercial spin of paroxetine efficacy, important protocol-designated safety data were unreported that may have shown paroxetine to produce potentially harmful adverse events.

***Key Words***: Ghostwriting, plagiarism, research misconduct, conflicts of interest, paroxetine, depression, antidepressants, pharmaceutical industry, GlaxoSmithKline, key opinion leaders

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