



## Editorial

# Relations Between Respiratory Medicine and the Pharmaceutical Industry

## Relación de la neumología con la industria farmacéutica

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### Introduction

The relations between the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession have always been the subject of debate and controversy. The need to make safe and effective new drugs available for treating diseases, and also to ensure that health-care professionals are on hand to guarantee the proper use of these drugs makes the search for common objectives between the industry and the medical profession indispensable.

In respiratory medicine in particular, in my experience, there has always been, from our earliest contacts, a feeling of enthusiastic cooperation with the effort to improve our understanding and management of respiratory diseases. I will attempt to make this clear with examples to summarize the main points of contact between the pharmaceutical industry and pulmonology in Spain.

### Clinical Research

The very existence of the pharmaceutical industry is based on the search for and development of new drugs that, after years of clinical trials, show the acceptable balance between effectiveness and safety that is necessary for better management of disease.

Through their participation in clinical trials both on a national and, increasingly, on a multinational scale, Spanish pulmonologists continue to contribute to the development of such new drugs. It would be difficult, at the present time, not to consider including Spanish hospitals in the most important studies. I could cite many trials for the main drugs used to treat respiratory diseases, but due to my familiarity with the area of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), I will mention only the UPLIFT study—the acronym refers to Understanding Potential Long-term Impacts on Function with Tiotropium. Due to the number of patients enrolled (5993), its duration (4 years), and its design, this multinational

study has contributed important data that can help increase our understanding of COPD. Spanish respiratory medicine played an active role in enrolling a total of 314 patients. Thus, of the 37 participating countries, Spain was the country with the fourth largest number of patients enrolled.

I would like to mention, however, some of the difficulties the industry has recently been encountering in carrying out clinical trials with respiratory medicine departments in Spain: hospital managements are slow to sign contracts, staffing is inadequate to ensure that the trials are carried out properly, and a high number of competing trials interfere with proper patient selection. It is especially important to ensure that the studies proceed properly, in terms of both quality and timing, as future participation in developing new drugs depends on this.

The research relationships between respiratory medicine and the pharmaceutical industry are not limited to clinical trials of particular drugs. The enormous importance of all studies aiming to improve our understanding of diseases, in terms of their prevalence and diagnosis on the one hand and their impact or future consequences on the other, whether on a national or a local level, should also be mentioned. The IBERPOC study is a perfect example of such cooperation. This study, initiated by the Spanish Society of Pulmonology and Thoracic Surgery (SEPAR) and sponsored by a pharmaceutical laboratory, is the authoritative study on the prevalence of COPD in Spain. The results revealed the situation of COPD in this country and allowed SEPAR to adopt measures and promote projects to improve management of the disease.

The enormous number of pulmonologists interested in the discovery of new evidence, new facts, new ways of working, and more ensures that our cooperation in research will continue.

### Training

The constant emergence of new evidence forces us to ensure that there is continuous training in all medical specialties. One of the main

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objectives of the pharmaceutical industry is to support training in various aspects of diseases (general knowledge, diagnosis, treatment, etc), adapted to the various specialties. Many programs with various formats have been set up: there have been distance (online) medical training programs, courses given at outstanding institutions in Spain or abroad, courses for residents, and many more. Training is concerned not only with improving our understanding of disease, but also addresses issues important to clinical practice, such as the critical reading of scientific articles and legal and ethical questions, etc.

### **Information**

From the pharmaceutical industry's position, providing the pulmonologist with accurate information on the properties and benefits of its products in accordance with ethical principles is essential for allowing the physician to properly evaluate the suitability of the drugs. Communication between the pharmaceutical industry and health-professionals is made possible through conferences and symposia, on the one hand, and visits from drug company representatives, on the other hand. Because of the development of new ways of communicating knowledge, the importance of conferences as a means of disseminating information and of keeping abreast of scientific advances has sometimes been called into question. Personally, I believe in conferences as a fundamental tool for sharing knowledge and experience both among pulmonologists and between pulmonologists and the pharmaceutical industry. The industry has always been present at the most important conferences in this field, providing information about and promoting

its drugs, and offering support so that these conferences can attain the highest possible scientific quality. I have also always believed in the role of the sales representative as a key figure for transmitting the latest information on a particular drug and on all other aspects of diseases. Thanks to the excellent relations between pulmonologists and sales representatives, there is an enriching exchange of information, as the pulmonologists' questions, needs, and concerns can be responded to quickly and effectively.

I would not like to close without mentioning the good relationship that exists between scientific societies and the industry, both nationwide and in the various autonomous communities. The most important laboratories are among the sponsors of SEPAR, give active support to its development, and always find the door open to dialog. No less important is the work undertaken together with societies in the autonomous communities. These societies provide the necessary driving force that makes it possible to meet local needs through projects and studies that are indispensable for the advancement of respiratory medicine in Spain.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to share in this journal, which I feel very close to my acquaintance with the relations between respiratory medicine and the pharmaceutical industry. I express the point of view of a physician who for several years has been caught up in the excitement of work on gratifying projects and activities undertaken by our 2 communities, mainly in the field of COPD.