



2 December 2016

## The BMJ Press Release

### Independent experts find no grounds for retraction of The BMJ article on dietary guidelines

- *Formal reviews reject calls for retraction led by Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)*
- *Reviewers say criticisms of methods used by the guidelines committee “are within the realm of scientific debate,” and merit “further investigation of the composition of the committee”*
- *The BMJ is publishing a notice of correction and clarification*
- *Journal stands by the article and will continue to provide a forum for debate on the science and politics of nutrition*

Two independent experts who conducted formal post-publication reviews of an article in **The BMJ** questioning the science behind US dietary guidelines have found no grounds for retraction.

The BMJ is, however, publishing a notice of correction and clarification to the article on the basis of the reviews and internal assessment of the issues raised.

The article by Nina Teicholz, published in September 2015, argued that the US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) used weak scientific methods to develop the guidelines.

The article went through The BMJ's standard peer review and editorial processes.

However, in an open letter to The BMJ organised by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), over 100 scientists raised specific concerns about the article and asked for it to be retracted.

The BMJ decided to refer the matter to two independent experts in systematic reviews of evidence for guidelines and agreed to abide by their findings.

They were Professor Lisa Bero, Chair of Medicines Use and Health Outcomes at the University of Sydney, and Professor Mark Helfand, Professor of Medical Informatics and Clinical Epidemiology at the Oregon Health & Science University.

Both reviewers found that the authors of the CSPI letter were correct in their contention that the DGAC report described methods for identifying, selecting, and evaluating evidence for its report.

But they also noted problems with the committee's methods and rejected the letter's contention that the article should be retracted.

Professor Bero concluded: "Teicholz's criticisms of the methods used by DGAC are within the realm of scientific debate" and Professor Helfand said that "it is clear that further investigation of the composition of the committee, as well as its conflict of interest policies and work group structure, are warranted."

The problems noted by the reviewers included the committee's methods being out of date and lacking sufficient detail, which could have introduced bias.

Dr Fiona Godlee, The BMJ's Editor in chief said: "We stand by Teicholz's article with its important critique of the advisory committee's processes for reviewing the evidence, and we echo her conclusion: 'Given the ever increasing toll of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and the failure of existing strategies to make inroads in fighting these diseases, there is an urgent need to provide nutritional advice based on sound science.'"

She added: "Neither Teicholz nor The BMJ are new to criticism. Healthcare is rife with controversy and the field of nutrition more so than many, characterised as it is by much weak science, polarised opinion, and powerful commercial interests.

But nutrition is perhaps one of the most important and neglected of all health disciplines, traditionally relegated to non-medical nutritionists rather than being, as we believe it deserves to be, a central part of medical training and practice.

The BMJ plans to continue to provide a forum for debate on the science and politics of food; for example, we are collaborating with researchers from Tufts University in Massachusetts and the University of Cambridge on a series of articles examining the science and politics of food, which is due to be published next year."

Nina Teicholz commented: "I am very grateful to The BMJ editors for their profound commitment to verifying the facts of my article and for their professionalism and integrity throughout this process. I am also grateful that they are providing a space for rigorous scientific debate, especially on a subject so important to public health. I hope the original intention of that article can now be fulfilled—to help improve nutritional advice, so that it is based on rigorous science. This will help us to better combat nutrition-related diseases that have caused so much human suffering around the world."

[Ends]

## Note to Editors

Correction: <http://www.bmj.com/content/355/bmj.i6061>

Invitations to the reviewers:

1. [http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response\\_attachments/2016/12/invitation\\_review\\_bero.pdf](http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response_attachments/2016/12/invitation_review_bero.pdf)
2. [http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response\\_attachments/2016/12/invitation\\_review\\_helfand.pdf](http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response_attachments/2016/12/invitation_review_helfand.pdf)

Reviewer comments:

1. [http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response\\_attachments/2016/12/BMJreview\\_11\\_12\\_15\\_Bero\\_LB.pdf](http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response_attachments/2016/12/BMJreview_11_12_15_Bero_LB.pdf)
2. [http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response\\_attachments/2016/12/Teicholz\\_Helfand\\_report\\_011216\\_4ja.pdf](http://www.bmj.com/sites/default/files/response_attachments/2016/12/Teicholz_Helfand_report_011216_4ja.pdf)

Letter from CPSI:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4962/rr-36>

Response by Fiona Godlee:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4962/rr-48>

Response by Nina Teicholz:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4962/rr-49>

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