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## How Big Oil is manipulating climate science

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Our world is changing. The UK has a new king (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2196),<sup>1</sup> one who believes that modern medicine must combine the “best of new technology and current knowledge with ancient wisdom” (doi:10.1258/jrsm.2012.12k095),<sup>2</sup> and a new prime minister, Liz Truss, who promises to deliver, deliver, and deliver (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2147).<sup>3</sup> England has a new health secretary, with a worrying track record on health (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2193).<sup>4</sup> The US has introduced a law that limits the profiteering of drug companies (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2163).<sup>5</sup> Scotland is considering legalising assisted dying (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2205).<sup>6</sup> And *The BMJ* has appointed three new columnists (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2201, doi:10.1136/bmj.o2195, doi:10.1136/bmj.o2206).<sup>7-9</sup>

And yet, covid persists in posing questions that are difficult to answer (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2183),<sup>10</sup> including the merits and role of testing (doi:10.1136/bmj-2022-071215, doi:10.1136/bmj.o2055).<sup>11-12</sup> A plan to solve the workforce crisis has many obvious factors to consider yet remains elusive (doi:10.1136/bmj-2022-072977)<sup>13</sup>; new evidence underscores the worrying link between doctors' burnout and deterioration in patient care (doi:10.1136/bmj-2022-070442, doi:10.1136/bmj.o2157)<sup>14-15</sup>; health service whistleblowers still receive shoddy treatment (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2187)<sup>16</sup>; and people at the end of life continue to struggle to benefit from palliative care (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2202).<sup>17</sup>

Another constant in our ever changing world is industry's attempts to manipulate science, behaviour that we would now describe as disinformation. Our new investigation details the role of oil and gas companies in hijacking science at elite universities in the US, mimicking the tactics of tobacco companies (doi:10.1136/bmj.o2095).<sup>18</sup> By demanding more science, not less, and, crucially, influencing science to counter research that shows smoking to be harmful, the tobacco companies pulled off a “public relations masterstroke.” It's a success that oil and gas companies have sought to emulate since the turn of the millennium.

Two particular areas of focus are the push for fracking, something of which Liz Truss has spoken favourably—despite evidence pointing to climate harm from methane leaks (doi:10.1136/bmj.k2397)<sup>19</sup>—and for developing carbon capture technology, a response to carbon emissions that has seen universities receive huge donations even though industry's internal documents accept that carbon capture doesn't make economic or environmental sense.

Evidence of attempts to manipulate science were persuasive in our decision to stop publishing research funded by the tobacco industry (doi:10.1136/bmj.f5193).<sup>20</sup> We already support

divestment from fossil fuels, and this new investigation is another spur for medical and healthcare organisations to join us (doi:10.1136/bmj.m167).<sup>21</sup> Our policy is also to decline all research funded by companies that produce fossil fuels, although their involvement in research into alternative green energy solutions makes this calculus more complex.

Oil and gas companies have won in their strategy to become intricately entangled with the solutions to the climate crisis that they have contributed to, worsened, and profited from. How far have the tentacles of disinformation on climate science extended when a new report from Oxford University concludes that the costs of switching to green energy have been overestimated by trillions of dollars (doi:10.1016/j.joule.2022.08.009)?<sup>22</sup> There is a clear challenge for academia, as with the tobacco industry, to release itself from the scientific grip of Big Oil. On the surface everything's changing, but why do we still feel the same? Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

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