

Glyco-Forum section

Letter to the Glyco-Forum

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Received on January 2, 2008; accepted on June 4, 2008

Thank you for asking me to comment on the article by Schnaar and Freeze entitled “A ‘Glyconutrient Sham’,” which addresses a serious matter affecting the field of glycobiology. I will not reiterate most of the major issues, as they have been thoroughly documented in the article. Rather, I will focus on the overarching moral imperative that trumps all the others. Regardless of who is right or wrong about any of the issues, it appears that many desperately ill patients and parents of children with serious chronic disorders are being misled. A recent related news article in *Science* (Kaiser, 2007) focused on the conflict, but did not emphasize what might be the motivation of scientists who have

taken such a stand against commercial interests. The answer lies not just in the lack of evidence for definite health benefits of a mixture of apparently indigestible plant polysaccharides that are not derived from any known traditional medicines. The predominant reason is the many contacts that academic glycobiologists like myself have had from desperate patients and their families and friends, regarding extravagant claims for therapeutic efficacy made by sales associates. Like others, I have spent time responding to such queries, some of which seem to involve patients denying themselves known effective and standardized therapies for serious diseases. Together with false hopes given to families of other patients with incurable chronic diseases, the situation impels taxpayer-funded scientists like myself to speak out. As Kaiser concludes in her *Science* article, “health claims must be based on solid science.”

Reference

Kaiser J. 2007. Who owns glycobiology? *Science*. 318:734–737.