

Concept of “opinion leader”: Recommendations of the Committee on Ethics and Transparency in the Medical-Industry Relationship (CETREMI) of the National Academy of Medicine (ANM)

Rubén Burgos*, Carlos Alberto Aguilar-Salinas, Leonor Barile-Fabris, Manuel Sigfrido Rangel-Fraustro, Óscar Arrieta, Carlos Campillo, Miguel Ángel Celis, Manuel de la Lata, Judith Domínguez, José Halabe, Sergio Islas, Luis Jasso, Alberto Lifshitz, Mucio Moreno, Ricardo Plancarte, Alejandro Reyes, Antonio Soda, Emma Verástegui and Julio Sotelo

Comité de Ética y Transparencia en la Relación Médico-Industria, Academia Nacional de Medicina de México

The relationship that involves the *physician* and the (*pharmaceutical*) *industry* encompasses a broad spectrum of forms, which requires a clear and transparent exposition of terms and principles. One of the essential objectives of the *industry* is having an academic support that allows for its products' characteristics and properties –efficacy, efficiency and safety– to become known with the purpose for them to be prescribed and used. The purposes of the *industry* are the sale of its products, recognition as prestige companies and economic profit. Implicitly, for the Ethics and Transparency Committee on the Physician-Industry Relationship (CETREMI – *Comité de Ética y Transparencia en la Relación Médico-Industria*) the most important principle in this relationship is, unquestionably, patient benefit.

In general, the *industry* uses the term “opinion leader” when referring to *physicians* and health personnel whose academic image and communication skills are able to directly or indirectly influence on the diagnostic, evaluative and therapeutic behavior of their colleagues. Achievement of the goals set by the *industry*

with regard to its products, especially commercial goals, considers the importance of counting on the analytic and innovative skills of a *physician*, invested for this purpose as an “opinion leader” by the *industry* itself. “Opinion leader” is a term coined in English that is also translated as “the leader’s opinions” and “leader owing to his/her opinions”. The concept behind this denomination refers to the opinion of a person that influences on the thought, attitude and behavior of his/her peers in decision-making. In spite of the academic weight that is tried to be given to the term “opinion leader”, it is actually an adjectival expression and not an academic degree, diploma or certificate issued by any educational entity at all, and stems from the marketing two-step flow of communication theory, and it is based on a way to win adepts to the promoted product.

According to this information, especially to issues concerned with the commercial aspect, and in view of the need to clarify and make the *physician-industry* relationship transparent, CETREMI recommends not to use the term “opinion leader” within the context of the *physician-industry* relationship.

Correspondence:

*Rubén Burgos

E-mail: r.burgos.vargas@gmail.com