

MMR researcher paid by vaccine makers

by Maxine Frith, Medical Reporter

A scientist researching the controversial MMR jab for the Government is also being employed by a drug company that makes the vaccine, the Evening Standard has learned.

Campaigners who are concerned that there could be a link between MMR and autism in children said it was "disgraceful" that Dr. Phil Minor was being paid by pharmaceutical giant Glaxo-SmithKline (GSK) while also being employed as an independent expert.

Dr Minor, who works for the Government's National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) is also working for GSK in a legal test case being brought by eight families who say their children were damaged by MMR.

Julie Kirkbride MP said: "This news will hardly inspire public confidence. It is a pity that the Government could not find doctors who the public would believe are more open."

GSK is one of three MMR manufacturers being sued by the parents of children who were allegedly damaged by the jab. The other two companies are Aventis Pasteur MSD and Merck & Co.

More than 1,000 children are involved in the legal action. Eight are being used in a legal test case due to come before the High Court in October next year.

Last week it was announced that the Department of Health had given £300,000 to fund an NIBSC study which will attempt to copy research by Dr Andrew Wakefield, who has suggested that there is a link between MMR and autism. The three-year study is part of continuing research into MMR by the NIBSC. Dr Minor is a key member of the team.

He is an expert virologist and also sat on the Medical Research Council's recent review body into autism which last December said that there was "no evidence" to support a link between the condition and MMR.

All the experts and lay members on the review body were asked to declare their interests. In documents seen by the Evening Standard, Dr Minor said he had no commercial-or academic interestsbut under "others" stated he was an "expert adviser on molecular virology in MMR-autism cases".

He did not state whether he was working for a specific company. But today a spokesman for GSK confirmed that Dr Minor is retained by the company.

Dr Minor was unavailable for comment but Dr Stephen Inglis, director of the NIBSC, said: " I would object extremely strongly to any suggestion that our work is not objective. Any implication that there is no objectivity in this study is outrageous."

However, Julie Loch, whose six-year-old son Oliver is one of the eight children bringing the landmark legal case, said: "It's disgraceful. We have been campaigning for independent research and that is what we thought we were getting with this new study. How can we believe that this is going to be independent when one of the main researchers is obviously on the side of the drugs companies?"

"This research will be a whitewash."