

Sen. Grassley Investigates Emory Researcher

By [Kate Borger](#) Posted: 08/27/2009

Emory psychiatrist Zachary Stowe came under fire for financial misconduct this summer after Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) alleged that Stowe had accepted large payments from GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) while serving as chief investigator on a grant that partly concerned a GSK pill.

In a June 2 letter to University president James W. Wagner which was posted on the Wall Street Journal's website, Grassley, the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, wrote that because Stowe, who has been the primary investigator of several National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants regarding the effects of depression and treatment for pregnant women, received money from GSK during the time of research involving GSK anti-depression pill Paxil, his findings may have been influenced.

After conducting an independent investigation, the University issued Stowe a letter of reprimand and corrective action plan. This forced Stowe to eliminate all current conflicts of interests on any grants and forbade him from committing any future conflicts of interests for two years, even if these conflicts could be easily circumvented or mitigated, according to a June 10 University press release.

Grassley did not respond to requests to comment.

The University has taken no further actions in reprimanding Stowe, said Jeffrey Molter, vice president of health sciences communications.

Allegations against Stowe came less than a year after an internal investigation in fall 2008 determined that Charles B. Nemeroff, former chairman of the Emory School of Medicine, did not report at least \$800,000 in outside income.

In a deposition given last September, Stowe stated that he had been on GSK's speaker bureau since 1999 and that on top of his \$232,000 Emory salary, he earned an additional 20 to 30 percent working for pharmaceutical companies such as GSK.

However, GSK reported to Grassley that the company paid Stowe \$154,400 in 2007, which is more than double the amount Stowe reported in the September deposition. Molter said that Stowe has since resigned from the GSK speaker bureau.

Grassley wrote in the June 2 letter that his office had informed NIH officials of Stowe's financial conflicts of interest last summer. According to NIH policy, grantees can only receive up to \$10,000 per pharmaceutical company per year, but the onus is on the universities to monitor potential conflicts of interest. Grassley alleged that Stowe had given about 38 promotional talks for antidepressant drugs by October 2008.

Stowe stated in a 2008 testimony that the pharmaceutical companies paid him to write review articles for scientific journals.

In his letter to Wagner, Grassley brought special attention to an e-mail between employees at GSK and a public relations firm hired by GSK.

The e-mail stated, "Dr. Stowe is on board for publicity efforts" and that GSK would meet with

Stowe the following week in order to “arm him with key messages for this announcement.”

Furthermore, the e-mail stated, “We are sending the release for your review at the same time in efforts to secure distribution on Emory letterhead (as you know, would provide further credibility to data for the media).”

In his testimony, Stowe confirmed the contents of the e-mail.

Grassley’s letter to Emory concluded with a list that included requests for Emory to explain how the University managed, reduced or eliminated Stowe’s conflicts of interest, to list the amount of money paid directly to Stowe as salary for each grant and to provide an update on any reports of research misconduct by Stowe and the subsequent action that Emory will consider.

Molter said that the University has complied with Grassley’s requests.

— *News Editor Matthew Tamul contributed to reporting.*

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