



Professor's research funded by multi-million drug manufacturer

THE world-renowned professor whose research unit led studies expected to lead to a new era of widespread heart drug treatment has had multi-million pound funding from the manufacturers of statins to carry out his work.



Pfizer is one of the leading companies in the production of statins[GETTY]

Professor Sir Rory Collins, of Oxford University, also received tens of thousands in prize money from leading statin maker Pfizer for his research, which highlighted the benefits of the drug.

Opponents of statins say the risks, which include severe muscle pains, cataracts, diabetes and memory loss, outweigh the benefits for healthy, low-risk patients.

They argue new national guidelines recommending them to one-in-four adults should be independent of industry funding.

Professor Collins, who recently warned that GPs' suspicion of statins could end up costing lives, says that his research is independent, adding: "The results are the results. They bear no relation to our funders."

He also said he donated the Pfizer prize money to further research.

It is not suggested that the professor is influenced in any way by the bodies funding the research but shadow health minister Andrew Gwynne said: "Patients want to know they can trust the advice they are given."

Cholesterol expert Dr Malcolm Kendrick said: "Professor Collins may claim to receive no funding directly from industry. However his personal and professional standing is underpinned by his research unit which relies on industry funding."

Professor Collins is co-director of the Clinical Trial Service Unit, whose pharmaceutical-sponsored work led drug watchdog the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to recommend widespread prescription of statins.

One of the most influential trials led by Professor Collins, involving 30,000 patients from all over the world, received £96.1million from statin manufacturer Merck Sharp & Dohme.

Professor Collins, who has led the largest trials in the world showing the benefits of statins, has also had funding from cholesterol-lowering drug manufacturers AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Merck and Sanofi in other studies.

In October 2004 Pfizer awarded him a £50,000 prize for his work highlighting the benefits of the drugs. He said: "We have a policy not to accept personal money from drug companies except for costs of travel and accommodation for scientific meetings."

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Cholesterol expert