



20 August 2019

Dr. Baker, Michael  
[Michael.Baker@uhn.ca](mailto:Michael.Baker@uhn.ca)

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your email. Respectfully, we must decline the invitation to meet with you and with Dr. Odame. We believe that this meeting is not in the best interests of UHN patients.

The necessity of a non-conflicted, expert, and external individual was emphasized repeatedly in extensive correspondence with UHN Administration after this “review” of patient care was proposed by Dr. Kevin Smith in January 2019, at a time when our February 2019 PLoS paper detailing the harms sustained by UHN patients was in press. At that time, Dr. Smith explicitly decreed that an external reviewer without conflicts of interest and one that would be agreed upon by both parties -- those parties being the physicians who had exposed UHN patients to unlicensed deferiprone therapy over six years, and those who had published the outcomes of this unlicensed exposure in PLoS 2019 -- would be necessary. There was a clear understanding of a requirement of a non-biased external reviewer on which both parties were to reach agreement.

It is therefore troubling to learn that Dr. Isaac Odame was selected, in the absence of consultation or discussion with us, to review the practices of the physicians whose switching of UHN patients from first line therapy to unlicensed deferiprone between 2009 and 2015 led to harms as published in PLoS. We submit that it would be difficult to identify an individual with more conflicts of interest in this matter than Dr. Odame.

Those who appointed Dr. Odame would have been aware of this conflict, including through review of Dr. Odame’s (December 2018) CV which shows that Dr. Odame:

- is Dr. Richard Ward’s supervisor and mentor;
- has acknowledged that he “meets regularly with” Dr. Ward;
- had supervised Dr Ward's research dissertation;
- continues to “provide career advice” to Dr. Ward in support of “[Ward’s role] in ... the adult hemoglobinopathy program”;
- is founder and chair of the Canadian Hemoglobinopathy Group in which Dr. Ward also “has assumed a leadership role”;
- co-authored, in 2018, a publication with Dr. Ward (one of the two peer reviewed papers co-authored by Dr. Odame that year).

Further, that a non-conflicted, expert, and external individual was judged to be necessary to conduct this review is made clear in correspondence from Dr. Ward to you dated February 26, 2019, following a request by you to Dr. Ward to propose reviewers with no previous professional or personal conflicts of interest. In that correspondence, Dr. Ward had claimed, with respect to Dr Ryan: “I have no personal or professional connection,” with respect to Dr Cohen: “I do not know him personally nor have I worked with him in the past,” with respect to Dr Piga: “I have not worked with him previously,” and with respect to Dr Coates: “I have not worked with him previously.”

It is not apparent to us why these claims were submitted if the goal of identifying external reviewer(s) who were unbiased by close relationships, with either parties, was not critical to the credibility of this “review”.

Further, in response to our proposal of Dr David Rees (a respected authority in both thalassemia and sickle

cell disease who, after training in Oxford with Sir David Weatherall, continued to lead research and clinical work including significant publications in thalassemia) as an independent reviewer, Dr. Ward objected to Dr. Rees as follows:

*“I understand that [Dr. Rees] is a pediatric hematologist and does not work in the thalassemia field. As you are aware, sickle cell is a very different disease from thalassemia. The treatment paradigms for adults with iron overload also differ from those in pediatrics due to the often more severe degree of iron overload. For these reasons, I do not think [Dr. Rees] is best suited to act as an external reviewer.”*

Dr. Ward raised at least two objections against Dr. Rees: the first that Dr. Rees is a pediatrician: *“The treatment paradigms for adults with iron overload also differ from those in pediatrics due to the often more severe degree of [sic] iron overload.”* Whether or not this observation is valid, we observe that Dr. Isaac Odame is also a pediatrician, having received his pediatric training in Ghana and Scotland. It is not clear on what logical basis Dr. Ward objected to Dr. Rees (*who has no allegiance to Dr. Ward*) because he is a pediatrician, nor why these objections were accepted by UHN, given that Dr. Odame (*also a pediatrician, with allegiances to Dr. Ward*) was acceptable as a reviewer to Dr. Ward and to UHN.

A second objection raised by Dr. Ward about Dr. Rees is that *“Dr. Rees does not work in the thalassemia field”* along with the insight that *“sickle cell is a very different disease from thalassemia.”* However, Dr. Odame’s CV reveals exactly two publications relevant to thalassemia: one published seven years ago (in which Dr. Odame was fourth author, of ten), and a second published six years ago (in which Dr. Odame was ninth author, of 13). In short, there is no evidence that Dr. Odame “works in the thalassemia field”. This was the objection Dr. Ward raised against Dr. Rees (accepted by UHN), to suggest that Dr. Rees was not “suited to act as an external reviewer.”

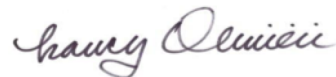
On the basis on the above loss of good faith in these proceedings, including the unilateral, secret appointment of a biased and conflicted reviewer, we respectfully can see no point in meeting to discuss such a “review”.

Instead we respectfully request that you please send us the review at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



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