

'MALIGN' EFFECT

An MP is concerned about the limited progress of a government-backed investigation into the conduct of Sheffield University's study of Actonel, Procter & Gamble's billion-dollar osteoporosis drug.

After *The Times Higher* reported concerns last November that Sheffield researchers had put their names to the findings of a study on Actonel without carrying out their own independent analysis of the firm's drug-trial data, the Government's Chief Medical Officer asked the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to investigate.

But correspondence between the whistleblower, Aubrey Blumsohn, and the MHRA shows that little progress has been made.

On February 15, he wrote to Ian Oulsnam, the MHRA's senior investigator: "I have not been asked to provide any documentary evidence or data, no party at the MHRA has arranged to meet with me." In early March, he wrote: "I have no idea what you are supposedly 'investigating' since, as you know, you have had no relevant evidence or information from me and seem not to understand the ethical or scientific problem."

In the correspondence, Mr Oulsnam calls the case "low priority" and explains that the MHRA does not have a proper remit to investigate the issue because its "priority" is to inspect clinical trials where the risk to patients is "more apparent and immediate".

Paul Flynn, a Labour MP, said: "I trust entirely in Aubrey Blumsohn's integrity, but if the MHRA told me it is Monday I'd check the calendar. I have long campaigned against the malign selfish, greedy influence of the pharmaceutical industry in academic life and in subverting science. Their tentacles spread everywhere including deeply into the MHRA, which is the pharmaceutical industry regulating the pharmaceutical industry."