



Biden's Pick for Top NIH Post has Deep Ties to Pharma: \$290.8 million in Funding from Pfizer alone

Description

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All links to Gospa News articles have been added aftermath.

President Joe Biden this week nominated cancer specialist Dr. Monica Bertagnolli for director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) — a move that has already generated controversy because of Bertagnolli's longstanding financial ties to Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies.

If confirmed, Bertagnolli will replace the NIH's acting director, [Lawrence Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.](#), who has held the position since the NIH's previous permanent director, [Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.](#), resigned in December 2021.

She will oversee a \$47 billion budget that encompasses "a wide variety of medical research beyond cancer, including infectious diseases, heart disease, Alzheimer's and other brain disorders, diabetes, drug addiction and mental health," according to [The Associated Press](#).

Bertagnolli is director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the largest of the 19 institutes and seven centers under the aegis of the NIH. Biden named her NCI director in August, making her the first woman to hold the position.

In announcing the nomination, Biden highlighted [Bertagnolli's past experience](#) as a professor of surgical oncology at Harvard Medical School and a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston; CEO of Alliance Foundation Trials, LLC, which conducts international cancer clinical trials; and group chair of the Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology.

Bertagnolli's financial ties to Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies

Under Bertagnolli's leadership, the Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology has received more than \$323 million in funding from Pfizer and other Big Pharma firms, according to Open

Payments data revealed by The Daily Signal and The Heritage Foundation's Oversight Project.

In a series of tweets, [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#), Children's Health Defense chairman on leave and Democratic candidate for president in 2024, criticized Bertagnolli's nomination, noting that "The White House left the Pfizer connection out of its announcement of the nomination."

"Does this mean Dr. Bertagnolli is personally corrupt? Not at all. But it does mean that she will probably represent the viewpoints and priorities of the pharmaceutical industry. That is how agencies are captured," Kennedy wrote.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the recently retired director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, also part of the NIH, told The Washington Post that he personally advocated for Bertagnolli's nomination, citing her "very solid" academic record.

"She's got the kind of personality that I think is important for the director of NIH," Fauci said.

Bertagnolli also previously led gastrointestinal science initiatives at the NIH-funded Cancer Cooperative Groups, headed Dana-Farber Brigham Cancer Center's surgical oncology division, was founding chair of the Minimal Common Oncology Data Elements executive committee, and was former president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Biden 'well aware' of Bertagnolli's ties to pharma

Between 2015 and 2021, Bertagnolli, via the Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology, received \$290.8 million in funding from Pfizer alone, according to The Daily Signal. The funding consisted of at least 116 grants and made up 89% of the total grant monies she received during this period.

The data, collected from Open Payments — a national transparency platform operated by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services — also revealed that Bertagnolli received \$17.4 million in grant funding from Janssen Research & Development, LLC, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson (J&J).

Both Pfizer and J&J received Emergency Use Authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for their COVID-19 vaccines.

The Daily Signal reported on the funding in August 2022, at the time of Bertagnolli's confirmation as NCI director. In an email to The Daily Signal at the time, Bertagnolli said:

"The funding from Pfizer (and all other industry funding allocated to me) was not in the form of grants to me directly. This funding was in the form of contracts entered into by the Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology.

"All industry contracts were used by the Alliance's 3,000+ member clinical trials group to conduct cancer clinical trials. Importantly, virtually all of the funding from Pfizer was for a single large international breast cancer clinical trial — a very high \$\$ total because it enrolled over 6,000 patients over quite a number of countries.

"The funding was distributed across many different health care institutions — both academic and

community — to conduct the trial. Alliance overall does not have more involvement with one industry partner over another — it's just that this one Pfizer trial was very large and therefore very expensive.”

Oncology is a significant moneymaker for Pfizer — in its second-quarter report for 2022, the drugmaker reported \$3 billion in revenue from its oncology division.

Journalist Paul D. Thacker questioned the likely Big Pharma lobbying behind Bertagnolli's nomination, implying that public knowledge of her ties to Pfizer and other companies would not have been possible without the transparency afforded by the Open Payments platform:

“This is why I did 70 hour work-weeks for several years to get this law passed” Thacker said, referring to the Physician Payments Sunshine Act, which requires companies to report any gifts or payments they received exceeding \$10. The bill also led to the development of the Open Payments platform.

Thacker previously worked with Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and U.S. Senate lawyers to write the bill.

Prior to Bertagnolli's nomination, on April 26, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who chairs the Senate's health panel, sent Biden a letter saying he would “strongly oppose any future nominee to a major federal health agency who is not prepared to significantly lower the price of prescription drugs in this country.”

Sanders does not appear to have publicly commented on Bertagnolli's nomination, as of the time of this writing. In an interview with The Defender, Thacker questioned Bertagnolli's ability to resist pressure and lobbying from Big Pharma.

by Fabio G. C. Carisio

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Date Created

05/20/2023