

Lilly, Pfizer spent \$259M to talk up illness

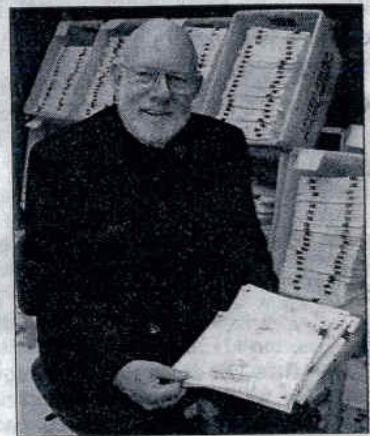
AP: Ads, grants
helped obscure
medical doubts

By **Matthew Perrone**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eli Lilly and Co. and Pfizer Inc. spent hundreds of millions of dollars last year to raise awareness of a murky illness, helping boost sales of pills recently approved as treatments and drowning out unresolved questions, including whether fibromyalgia is a real disease at all.

Key components of the indus-



KELLY GLASSCOCK / Associated Press

NEW PERSPECTIVE: Dr. Fredrick Wolfe was lead author of the guidelines defining fibromyalgia in 1990 but has since become one

try-funded buzz about the pain-and-fatigue ailment are grants — more than \$6 million donated by Lilly and Pfizer in the first three quarters of 2008 — to non-profit groups for medical conferences and educational campaigns, an Associated Press analysis found.

That's more than they gave for more accepted ailments such as diabetes and Alzheimer's. Among grants tied to specific diseases, fibromyalgia ranked third for each company, behind cancer and AIDS for Pfizer and cancer and depression for Lilly.

The drug makers' grant-making is dwarfed by ad spending. Lilly spent \$128.4 million in the first three quarters of 2008 on ads to promote Cymbalta, according to TNS Media Intelligence. Pfizer spent more than \$125 million advertising Lyrica.

Fibromyalgia draws skepticism for several reasons. The cause is unknown. There are no tests to confirm a diagnosis. Many patients also fit the criteria for chronic fatigue syndrome and other pain ailments.

Experts differ on what to call and how to treat patients' pain.

Many doctors and patients say the drug makers are educating the medical establishment about a misunderstood illness, much as they did with depression in the 1980s. Those with fibromyalgia have often had to fight perceptions that they are

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hypochondriacs or even faking. But critics say the companies are hyping fibromyalgia along with their treatments in a textbook example of how drug makers unduly influence doctors and patients.

"I think the purpose of most pharmaceutical company efforts is to do a little disease-mongering and to have people use their drugs," said Dr. Frederick Wolfe, who was lead author of the guidelines defining fibromyalgia in 1990 but has since become one of its leading skeptics.

Whatever the motive, the push has paid off. From the first quarter of 2007 to the fourth quarter of 2008, sales rose from \$395 million to \$702 million for Pfizer's Lyrica, and \$442 million to \$721 million for Lilly's Cymbalta.

Cymbalta, an antidepressant, won Food and Drug Administration approval as a treatment for fibromyalgia in June. Lyrica, originally approved for epileptic seizures, was approved for fibromyalgia a year earlier.

Drug makers respond to skepticism by pointing out that fibromyalgia is recognized by medical societies.

The FDA approved the drugs because they've been shown to reduce pain in fibromyalgia patients, though it's not clear how.