

Documents were not easy to get

Many previously unreleased documents discussed in The Journal series on drug testing were obtained through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

Under the Act, citizens and non-citizens can request government information.

Using the act, The Journal sent its first request to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last fall.

The broad request netted only a few basic documents.

The FDA argued it

could not respond to certain questions because information was not available or could not be found; the agency couldn't answer other questions because they were too broad; and some material could not be provided because it was considered confidential drug company data.

Although the FDA wanted to charge \$1,200 for some material, The Journal successfully argued that release of the documents was in the public interest and, after

three months of legal wrangling, all search and copying fees were waived.

By mid-January, more than 1,500 pages of FDA documents had been obtained. In many cases, the names of drugs, doctors and drug companies involved in the testing scandals were deleted by the FDA.

Those documents provided enough information for another series of requests. This time, the requests were more specific.

Hundreds of more pages of documents arrived over the next two months.

Still there were few drugs named in the documents. They had been thoroughly blotted out by FDA officials.

Testing

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drugs, said:

"In Canada, there is no requirement to repeat trials that are done somewhere else, provided the trials that are submitted are of good quality."

Dr. Dennis Cook, acting director general of the federal Health Department's drug directorate, said there is no system for government inspection of drug studies in humans.

He said any Canadian inspection program will cover only laboratories in this country. He said it is the responsibility of foreign governments to inspect work done in their own countries.

Ron Elliott, another federal health official, said Canada is just now developing a laboratory inspection program, but as yet there is no firm decision on when the program will start.