



Editorial Comment

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There is more public attention and frank concern about the relationship between physicians and pharmaceutical companies. More than 90% of the over \$20 billion marketing budget of the pharmaceutical companies is directed to physicians. There is no doubt that the contact with physicians is intended to promote the use of their products.

In 2007 Senators Grassley (R) and Kohl (D) introduced the Physician Payments Sunshine Act. This bill will require big pharmaceutical companies to disclose the amount of money they give to physicians- whether in the form of free meals, paid vacations or consultation fees. The idea behind this project is that the relationships between physicians and industry raise healthcare costs. Although we tend to deny influence in our practices by these interactions, the reality is that companies would not invest \$19 billion dollars every year if they would not be obtaining some benefits.

There are clearly some benefits that have arisen from the relationships between physicians and the industry. Many of the

current drugs and treatments would not have existed without physician enrollment of patients in trials. Participation in medical education activities have resulted in physicians changing their practices and improving patient care. The real problem is that the risks associated to these uncontrolled relationships with the industry may outweigh any potential benefits.

We all need to recognize that relationships with the industry are designed to influence our prescribing behavior. The impulse to reciprocate even for small gifts is a powerful influence in the way we behave. Ultimately, the costs of industry sponsored dinners, trips, and “freebies” are passed along to the patients we treat in the form of higher drug and device prices. This in turn may result in some patients being unable to adhere with recommended therapies.

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