

# Des Moines Register

September 13, 2007

## Patients should know about gifts to doctors

### THE REGISTER'S EDITORIALS

Last week Sen. Charles Grassley introduced legislation requiring makers of drugs and medical devices to report payments and gifts to doctors. The "Physician Payment Sunshine Act of 2007" would make the information available to the public online.

Let the light shine in. There's nothing like a little transparency to encourage ethical and honest behavior.

Assuming this legislation becomes law - and it should - Americans would have more information about the relationship between their doctors and drug makers. Was your blood-pressure medicine or the pacemaker chosen by your doctor in your best interest? Or was it in the financial interest of the manufacturer and the doctor?

Currently, only a few states require drug makers to report payments they make to doctors. Yet doctors - some of whom have received in excess of \$100,000 annually from drug makers - may be influenced to prescribe certain drugs, which might not be the most appropriate and might be more expensive than generic alternatives.

"Payments to a doctor can be big or small. They can be a simple dinner after work or they can add up to tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of dollars each year," Grassley said. "Right now the public has no way to know whether a doctor's been given money that might affect prescribing habits."

Grassley's bill would require disclosure for trips, conferences, consulting and entertainment payments - but not financing for a clinical trial or free drug samples given to doctors.

If drug companies fail to disclose information, they could be fined from \$10,000 to \$100,000 per offense - a punishment most Americans won't feel any pain about.