

EDITORIAL

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Is Your Doctor Tied to Drug Makers?

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It's no surprise that the pharmaceutical industry is appalled at proposals to set up a national registry of its gifts and payments to doctors. Too much information might lead patients to suspect that their doctors are choosing costly medicines out of gratitude to the manufacturers rather than for the best medical or economic interests of their patients.

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The drug companies ply doctors with a wide range of gifts, everything from free lunches for busy doctors and their staffs while sales representatives extol the virtues of their latest drugs to subsidized trips to vacation spots for conferences billed as educational events. The companies also pay large sums to doctors for consulting or for conducting research. These payments, which can mount into the hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of years, look suspiciously like inducements to promote or prescribe the companies' drugs.

Although medical societies and the industry's trade association have adopted voluntary guidelines that are supposed to limit payments and gifts to modest proportions, they typically still allow doctors to be paid as consultants or speakers, leaving plenty of room to lavish favors upon them. As Gardiner Harris reported in The Times last week, one drug company invited doctors to a weekend training session in Orlando, Fla., to learn how to give marketing lectures to other doctors for an asthma medicine. The enticement was free airfare, a rental car and hotel room, plus a \$2,700 stipend.

Several states have tried to rein in abuses by requiring some form of disclosure, but every state law has defects, most notably a failure to make doctor-specific data readily available to the public. Last week Senator Herb Kohl, a Wisconsin Democrat who is chairman of the Special Committee on Aging, and Senator Claire McCaskill, Democrat of Missouri, said they would push for a national registry that would force drug and medical device companies to report their gifts and payments to physicians.

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The legislation ought to require electronic reporting of all payments to individual doctors for posting in a registry that could be easily searched from home computers. If there is nothing wrong with such payments, neither the doctors nor the industry should object to public disclosure.

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Past Coverage

- [Senators to Push for Registry of Drug Makers' Gifts to Doctors \(June 28, 2007\)](#)
- [Psychiatrists Top List in Drug Maker Gifts \(June 27, 2007\)](#)
- [Doctor or Drug Pusher \(June 17, 2007\)](#)
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