Physician Interactions with Pharmaceutical Companies and Decreased Quality and Increased Cost In The U.S. Healthcare System
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Abstract

As long as pharmaceutical companies have existed, there has been direct pressure on physicians to recommend or prescribe their products. Patient advocate groups, leaders in organized medicine, and leaders in the field of bioethics are concerned that physician interactions with pharmaceutical representatives affect their prescribing practices in a significant way which can compromise quality care and increase health care costs.

In 2000, the pharmaceutical industry spent $54 billion annually in gifts and other marketing practices to physicians attempting to get them to prescribe their products. According to PhRMA, they spent approximately 30% of their total revenues that year which totaled $179 billion. Companies spend approximately $10.5 billion annually in the provision of samples of medications new to the market.

The concern is that doctors will prescribe less effective medications, including new brand name drugs without a generic equivalent, drugs which are not generally considered first line treatment in an evidence-based practice, and/or more expensive drugs, because doctors feel obligated to the pharmaceutical sales representative and depend on his provision of samples. Sociological research has shown a ‘gifting’ relationship that results in a person feeling obligated to reciprocate no matter what the size of the gift. Based on this research, one can conclude that even a gift as insignificant as a pen may have an impact on a physicians prescribing practices. Because of this, some medical organizations have advocated for limiting, or even avoiding, physician contact with pharmaceutical companies and their representatives.