

Who pays for the pizza? Redefining the relationships between doctors and drug companies. 1: Entanglement

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There is a brewing conflict between the world's leading medical campuses and big pharmaceutical companies.

"Twisted together like the snake and the staff, doctors and drug companies have become entangled in a web of interactions as controversial as they are ubiquitous."

"Studies from several countries show that 80-95% of doctors regularly see drug company representatives despite evidence that their information is overly positive and prescribing habits are less appropriate as a result."

"Many doctors receive multiple gifts from drug companies every year, and most doctors deny their influence despite considerable evidence to the contrary."

Drug industry interactions with doctors "correlate with doctors' preferences for new products that hold no demonstrated advantage over existing ones, a decrease in the prescribing of generics, and a rise in both prescription expenditures and irrational and incautious prescribing" of drugs.

"Accepting meals and expenses for travel or accommodation for sponsored educational meetings is common despite evidence that this is associated with an increase in formulary requests for and prescribing of the sponsor's drug."

"Most doctors attend company sponsored events providing continuing medical education, yet evidence shows that these preferentially high-light the sponsor's drug."

"Many professional societies rely heavily on industry sponsorship, just as their medical journals rely on drug company funded trials, company advertisements, company purchased reprints, and company sponsored supplements, despite the consequent conflicts of interest and evidence that sponsored supplements are more promotional than other articles."

"Entanglement between doctors and drug companies is widespread, and evidence shows that interactions with industry influence doctors' behaviour."

"Evidence is strong that [drug company] sponsored research tends to produce favourable results."

"Pharmaceutical expenditures are rising rapidly, and entanglement may undermine rational prescribing strategies."

"Critics argue that a culture of industry gift giving creates entitlements and obligations for doctors that conflict with their primary obligation to patients."

"Finding senior medical researchers or clinicians without financial ties to pharmaceutical companies has become exceedingly difficult."

"Thought leaders" routinely work as paid members of drug companies' advisory boards despite evidence that the practice is part of the drug industry's promotional machinery.

FORMS OF ENTANGLEMENTS:

- 1) Face to face visits from drug company representatives
- 2) Acceptance of direct gifts of equipment, travel, or accommodation
- 3) Acceptance of indirect gifts, through sponsorship of software or travel
- 4) Attendance at sponsored dinners and social or recreational events
- 5) Attendance at sponsored educational events, continuing medical education, workshops, or seminars
- 6) Attendance at sponsored scientific conferences
- 7) Ownership of stock or equity holdings
- 8) Conducting sponsored research
- 9) Company funding for medical schools, academic chairs, or lecture halls
- 10) Membership of sponsored professional societies and associations
- 11) Advising a sponsored disease foundation or patients' group
- 12) Involvement with or use of sponsored clinical guidelines
- 13) Undertaking paid consultancy work for companies
- 14) Membership of company advisory boards of "thought leaders" or "speakers' bureau"
- 15) Authoring "ghostwritten" scientific articles
- 16) Medical journals' reliance on drug company advertising, company purchased reprints, and sponsored supplements

"The routine wining and dining of prescribers is now seen by some legal authorities as bribery," as in Italy.

Drug companies sponsor professional societies and their guideline writing panels.

As an example, Genentech's gave the American Heart Association \$11 million.

"Numerous requests for an interview with pharmaceutical company Genentech, to discuss the guidelines of the American Heart Association and the broader issues of entanglement, were declined."

"Accredited events in continuing medical education seem little more than an opportunity for speakers paid by sponsors to speak about their drugs, particularly when even the lecture hall bears the sponsor's name." **[WOW!]**

Most scrutinized are the relationships that entail corporate funding of academic research: a recent review of the evidence found financial conflicts of interest to be "pervasive and problematic" in biomedical research, with a quarter of university researchers receiving industry funding and a third having personal financial ties to sponsors.

"The concern is that the evidence base of healthcare is being distorted fundamentally."

"Strong and consistent evidence shows that [drug] industry sponsored research tends to draw conclusions favourable to industry and industry sponsored studies were much more likely to reach conclusions that were favourable to the sponsor than were non-industry studies." **[IMPORTANT]**

Arnold Relman, a Harvard professor and former editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, states:

"The medical profession is being bought by the pharmaceutical industry, not only in terms of the practice of medicine, but also in terms of teaching and research."

"The academic institutions of this country are allowing themselves to be the paid agents of the pharmaceutical industry. I think it's disgraceful."

For researchers, relations with individual drug companies that are worth less than \$10,000 a year don't require their disclosure.

"Given that many researchers have financial relations with multiple companies, the new rules could mean that large amounts of the private dealings of public academics would remain undisclosed."

Common ties between academics and private drug or biotech companies included:

- 1) Paid speaking arrangements, ranging from \$250 to \$20,000 a year

- 2) Paid consultancies, mostly less than \$10,000 but up to \$120,000 a year
- 3) Paid positions on drug company advisory boards
- 4) Equity holdings (stocks), mostly over \$10,000 and ranging up to \$1 million.

"In the United States an estimated 80,000 drug company representatives, backed by more than \$19 billion of industry's combined annual promotional budgets, are visiting doctors every day," including those working on the wards of hospitals. **[WOW!]**

"Almost every lunchtime, a [drug] company will sponsor free pizza or pasta at UCSF, and dozens of hungry resident doctors will attend."

"But the contacts that start with a free lunch are not just one-way sales pitches: many prescribing clinicians are also aspirant academics, and the friendly drug company staff who accompany the food can facilitate the flow of research funding, speaking tours, and precious publications on which successful medical careers are built."

"Across the United States drug companies sponsor close to 300,000 events for doctors every year as part of their promotional efforts, many of them far more generous than free pizza." **[WOW]**

It is considered acceptable for a drug company to fly "300 doctors to a golf resort, reimburses their costs, pay them to attend, and educate them about the company's latest drug, in order to train them to become members of the company's stable of paid speakers."

Influential university hospital physicians are paid to meet with drug industry executives to develop mutual understanding around issues related to entanglement.

Experts feel that the drug company free lunches and the sponsored education are a process of drug companies buying influence, building problematic relationships, creating conflicts of interest for prescribers, which in turn affect their judgments about the care of patients and drive up healthcare costs.

These entanglements between drug companies and doctors raise drug prices, raise the volumes of prescriptions, and raise the proportions of prescriptions written for the newer, more expensive drugs, while ignoring older, cheaper, but effective, medicines.

"Those in the university who are in charge of achieving more rational use of medicines are convinced that the entanglement between drug companies and doctors is part of the reason for the explosion in costs and part of the reason why attempts to control costs are undermined."

"The culture of gift giving, which starts with medical students, breeds a long term sense of entitlement."

"Doctors won't walk fifty yards at a big medical meeting without being transported in a drug company bus."

Thus, a sense of obligation developed in these doctors is in "direct conflict with doctors' primary obligation to their patients."

This article has a graph showing the escalation of US retail prescription drug spending between 1997 – 2001, as follows:

1997	\$78.9 billion
1998	\$93.4 billion
1999	\$111.1 billion
2000	\$131.9 billion
2001	\$154.5 billion

This represents a 100% increase in 4 years. **[AMAZING]**

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

- 1) Doctors, researchers, medical journals, professional societies, patient groups, teaching institutions, and leading academic institutions are all entangled with drug companies.
- 2) Drug companies routinely give doctors multiple gifts, meals, expenses for travel and accommodations at drug company sponsored educational meetings, equipment, books, dinners, social events, recreational events, drug company stocks, paid for drug company sponsored research, memberships to professional societies and associations, sponsor the creation of clinical guidelines, give paid consultant fees, arrange and pay for drug sponsored speaking fees, have professional writers "ghostwrite" pro-drug articles and then put a doctors name on it.
- 3) Interactions between drug companies and doctors results in a rise in both prescription expenditures and the irrational prescribing of drugs.
- 4) "The medical profession is being bought by the pharmaceutical industry, not only in terms of the practice of medicine, but also in terms of teaching and research."
- 5) "The academic institutions of this country are allowing themselves to be the paid agents of the pharmaceutical industry."
- 6) The United States has 80,000 drug company representatives who try to convince physicians to use their products.
- 7) Drug companies spend \$19 billion annually on drug promotion.
- 8) The entanglements between drug companies and doctors are a major reason for the explosion in medical costs.
- 9) As of 2001, US consumers spent \$154.5 billion on prescription drugs, a 100% increase as compared to 4 years prior.

10) This abuse between doctors and drug companies causes "direct conflict with doctors' primary obligation to their patients."