

## Ethics 101 Response – Working with industry representatives

The physician thinking about industry supported travel to New York might consider several professional issues:

In a tertiary care environment, the physician should be careful about role-modelling acceptance of largesse from industry. Medical trainees may come to believe that thinly veiled marketing influence on prescribing choices is an entitlement.

The physician in a tertiary care academic environment should read the book "The Truth About Drug Companies" written by Dr Marcia Angell, a former editor of the New England Journal of Medicine. Also the physician should become informed about the environment in New York and other parts of the United States where drug industry largesse has become a societal concern.

United States Senate discussions stimulated by the Grassley-Kohl Physician Payments Sunshine Act of 2009 have caused embarrassment for some academic physicians. The physician should read and consider the 2008 taskforce report of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) on industry sponsorship of medical education, and note the policies and guidelines on competing interests and disclosure. The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada has been less directive than its American counterpart, so far.

The finances of medical schools are currently under great stress, but there needs to be a properly balanced approach to acceptance of industry support for institutions vis-a-vis individuals.

If the physician has helped the drug company with legitimate clinical trials, he or she is not a company employee and should be aware of potential competing interests. And if the physician does accept support to attend the conference he or she will need to consider what to tell patients when prescribing the new drug, especially if there are reasonable alternative products.

Pharmaceutical marketing including promotion via physicians adds significantly to drug costs, and from July, 2010 an increased burden of prescription drug costs will fall on some senior Albertans following changes to Alberta Blue Cross rules.

As a group, physicians are better able to pay for travel than the majority of patients. Physicians may write off travel and conference costs against tax, and they can also receive AMA-negotiated benefits for CME.

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