

Letters

Doctors, Research and Drug Payments

Published: June 16, 2008

To the Editor:

Re “Researchers Fail to Reveal Full Drug Pay” (front page, June 8) and “Hidden Drug Payments at Harvard” (editorial, June 10):

The first obligations of those who conduct lifesaving research at American medical schools, teaching hospitals and research universities are to protect the safety of patients and assure the integrity and objectivity of science.

Researchers and their institutions must reveal to research participants potential financial conflicts of interest and comply with reporting requirements.

Our associations’ recent report, “Protecting Patients, Preserving Integrity, Advancing Health,” urges our medical schools and research universities to require clinical research faculty to report all outside income directly or indirectly related to professional responsibilities.

The report also strongly urges our institutions to develop and carry out rigorous oversight policies for institutional conflicts of interest.

The public must be assured that scientific results are honest and that patient safety is not compromised for financial gain. We are committed to these principles and hope to work with Senators Charles E. Grassley and Herb Kohl in their legislative effort.

Robert M. Berdahl

Darrell G. Kirch

Washington, June 11, 2008

The writers are presidents of, respectively, the Association of American Universities and the Association of American Medical Colleges.

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To the Editor:

The public deserves to have access to information about relationships between medicine and the pharmaceutical industry (“Hidden Drug Payments at Harvard,” editorial, June 10), just as the public should be aware of relationships between legislators and lobbyists.

Once we know about relationships, we can consider whether any potential conflicts they pose affect our own interests.

These relationships can have positive outcomes. Financing for much of the research that has allowed rapid advances in diagnosing and treating illnesses comes from the same pharmaceutical companies and device makers that profit when the research is successful. Often medical schools depend on income from this industry-backed research to educate the next generation of physicians.

The American Psychiatric Association supports and encourages the full disclosure of relationships between physicians and pharmaceutical companies and any other possible sources of conflicts of interest. Transparency helps to protect medical education, research and care.

But for real solutions, we have to look even further to ourselves and to our government to pay for the kind of medical education and research that has for decades provided new and better treatments for medical conditions.

Nada Stotland

Chicago, June 11, 2008

The writer, a medical doctor, is president of the American Psychiatric Association.

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To the Editor:

Re “Hidden Drug Payments at Harvard” (editorial, June 10):

While it is good news that there is a bill introduced in the Senate that would require “drug and device makers” to disclose payments to doctors that exceed \$500 annually, such disclosure should also be easily accessible to parents and other consumers.

In New York, a parent’s informed consent is required before a doctor can administer nonemergency psychotropic drugs to a child. In order to make a fully informed choice, parents must be aware of all the relevant information, which should include a doctor’s potential conflict of interest.

Lawyers are bound to disclose potential conflicts of interest because they may compromise the lawyer’s professional integrity. Doctors should be held to the same standard, especially where the lives of children are at stake.

Diane Goldstein Temkin

New York, June 10, 2008

The writer is a lawyer with the Mental Hygiene Legal Service, a state agency that protects the rights of the mentally disabled.

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To the Editor:

Re “Researchers Fail to Reveal Full Drug Pay” (front page, June 8):

The Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation supports full disclosure of pharmaceutical company payments to physicians and researchers. Parents and doctors need all the information to evaluate research on treatments, including information about potential conflicts.

Families living with pediatric bipolar disorder face challenges few others can imagine. Their children may be suicidal or explosive and unable to function in school or at home.

Early treatment saves lives and improves the long-term prognosis, but diagnosis typically trails onset by a decade. We cannot allow controversy or confusion to further harm children yet undiagnosed.

Complex psychiatric conditions like pediatric bipolar disorder require more well-designed, large-scale and long-term studies. These studies should be federally financed, so researchers will be less reliant on pharmaceutical financing.

Susan Resko

Exec. Dir., Child and Adolescent

Bipolar Foundation

Wilmette, Ill., June 8, 2008