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BUS 1040

Pharmaceutical Companies Influence Over Doctors

The work doctors perform everyday saves lives and can have a profound impact on our society today. This work revolves around a strict trust. To have that trust compromised could mean the difference between life and death. There are influences that can compromise that trust. To what extent does this occur and how?

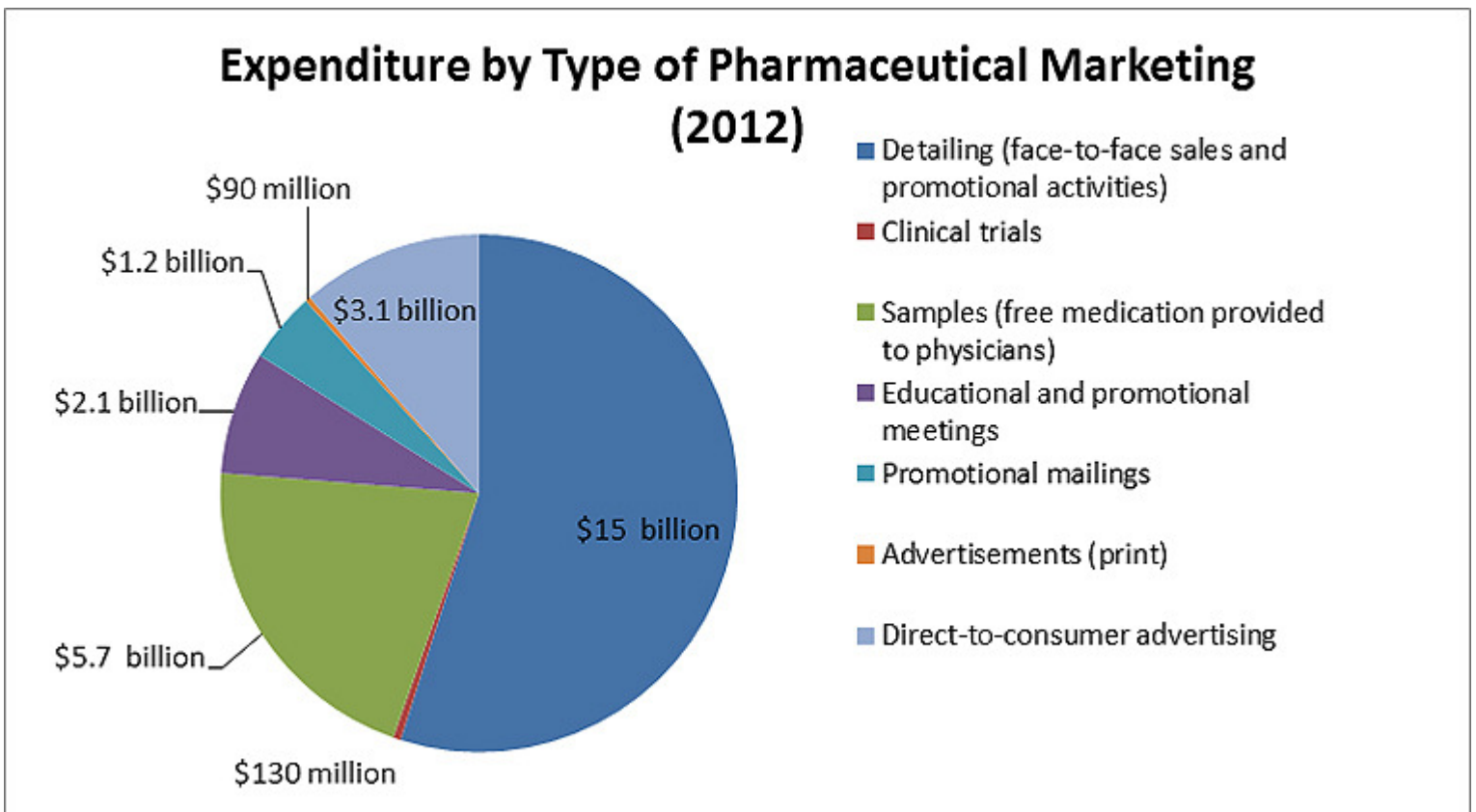
A controversial subject in the healthcare industry is the influence on doctors from the pharmaceutical industry. The American Medical Association's code of ethics states that "under no circumstances may physicians place their own financial interests above the welfare of their patients. The primary objective of the medical profession is to render service to humanity; reward or financial gain is a subordinate consideration. For a physician to unnecessarily hospitalize a patient, prescribe a drug, or conduct diagnostic tests for the physicians financial benefit is unethical. If a conflict develops between the physician's financial interest and the physicians responsibilities to the patient, the conflict must be resolved to the patients benefit."⁴ The main principle learned from this is that the patient comes first, not the doctor. A common concern is what impact gifts from the industry to doctors have. The code covers this matter as well. The following are some of the main opinions. Gifts should "primarily entail a benefit to patients and should not be of substantial value". "Gifts of minimal value are permissible as long as the gifts are related to the physicians work." There is also worry about consultations between doctors and pharmaceutical representatives negatively influencing the doctors. "The

Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs defines a legitimate "conference" or "meeting" as any activity, held at an appropriate location, where (a) the gathering is primarily dedicated, in both time and effort, to promoting objective scientific and educational activities and discourse (one or more educational presentation(s) should be the highlight of the gathering), and (b) the main incentive for bringing attendees together is to further their knowledge on the topic(s) being presented. An appropriate disclosure of financial support or conflict of interest should be made. Using these guidelines as a reference, we can review further research on the heart of the ethical issues in this matter.

Pharmaceutical companies spend billions on face to face sales, samples, promotional mailings and meetings. If you ask doctors many will say they aren't influenced by the pharmaceutical companies, but in fact many studies have shown that the marketing has drastically influenced their choices in what they prescribe. A classic study in 1982 showed this exact thing. There was a group of cerebral and peripheral vasodilators which were drugs that would increase flow to the brain or "oxygenate" it which the pharmaceutical companies said would help with dementia. Scientific literature however said that oxygenating the brain would not make the patients better but would actually make the dementia worse. There was also a drug called propoxyphene (Darvon). Darvon was said to be for pain from fractures or major surgeries. Scientific literature said "at best, Darvon is as effective as aspirin". In this study they did interviews with internists in the Washington area. 71% of doctors said that inferior blood to the brain was a major cause of dementia, and a third of them said they found vasodilators to be useful. Also almost half of the doctors said that Darvon was more potent than aspirin. They couldn't have possibly gotten that information from scientific

information. Even if the doctors didn't realize it they were pushing the products that were marketed to them.

This chart shows the amount spent by pharmaceutical companies in 2012.



Detailing is face-to-face activities which includes taking doctors out for lunches and giving the doctors gifts. It can also be sending doctors to retreats where they go to short informational meetings about the drugs then they can enjoy the resorts. In 2012 there were approximately 72,000 pharmaceutical sales representatives employed in the United States. Samples are where they give medication doses to physicians, which is shown to have significant increases in prescriptions for those drugs. The pharmaceutical companies claim that it is to help indigent patients it has been shown that most of the prescriptions go to patients with insurance so their medications are covered. Patients who are given samples have higher costs than those who don't

because they end up getting the name brand medications instead of the generic brands. Educational and promotional meetings are where they invite doctors to go to meetings in which industry-paid physicians discuss particular drugs. The speakers are often leaders in their field which gathers more participation. ProPublica³, an independent investigative news organization had an analysis that showed eight pharmaceutical companies providing \$220 million to speakers at these meetings. The events are also often done in restaurants where they will provide meals to the physicians who come. Promotional mailings are where pharmaceutical companies send unsolicited mailings to doctors. These mailings talk about drugs and tell of clinical trials and are often biased in favor of their own companies. They often just show the trials that went really well, not the ones that went badly. Journal and web advertisements are watched by the F.D.A. which often catches companies highlighting the benefits of their drugs but don't show the risks. Direct-to-consumer advertising has almost quadrupled since the F.D.A. released guidance that allowed companies to more easily advertise to consumers. This leads many people to buy their name brand products instead of the generic equivalents.

In 2011 pharmaceutical companies provided 32 percent of all funding for continuing education courses in the United States which is \$752 million out of \$2.35 Billion. Pharmaceutical companies supply educational grants to promote sales of their products. Pharmaceutical companies supply funding to health advocacy organizations. Organizations that have had funding often endorse the pharmaceutical companies, whereas if they don't get funding organizations often focus on the side effects of their drugs.

According to an article in USA Today, “The pharmaceutical companies spend more money on lobbying than any other single industry -- \$855 million from 1998 to 2006.”⁵ Suggesting that they have a large presence in the government as well. The same article discusses how many of our government officials raise millions of dollars in campaigning from pharmaceutical companies. There is a balance in this industry of ethical behavior and civil rights. The industry has the right to market however they chose regardless of the patients who eventually are most affected by those decisions. Our society is becoming more and more aware of these concerns. According to a local pharmacist, “The problem has changed. I haven’t seen pharmaceutical representatives in about 2 years now. They used to come all the time to leave us pens and drug information. Some of the evolving issues are shifting to the health insurance providers. You would be interested to see how they make their decisions in choosing which medications they cover.”⁶ Which begs the question, has your trust been compromised by the individuals who have a large responsibility to help you? With all that goes on behind the scenes at the everyday doctor’s office, are you really getting the help you need?

Sources

- 1.<http://www.pewhealth.org/other-resource/persuading-the-prescribers-pharmaceutical-industry-marketing-and-its-influence-on-physicians-and-patients-85899439814>
- 2.<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/submitted/morreim/prescribing.html>
- 3.<http://www.propublica.org/series/dollars-for-docs>
- 4.<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/medical-ethics/code-medical-ethics.page?>

5. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-05-10-senators-drug-bill_N.htm

6. Interview with Dr. Corey Jensen

Q: Please state your name, occupation and training.

A: I am Corey Jensen. I have been a pharmacist for 23 years. I received my degree and licensing through the University of Utah.

Q: What can you tell me about the influence of pharmaceutical representatives over doctors?

A: .I haven't seen pharmaceutical representatives in about 2 years now. They used to come all the time to leave us pens and drug information. That has kind of stopped now.

Q: What would you say has changed?

A: More people became aware of what was going on. Many companies stopped hiring reps and focused on marketing. It is easier to market directly to the consumers through TV.

Q: Does this kind of influence still occur?

A: Probably but to a smaller degree. I think the problem has changed. With Obamacare and other health care regulations, some of the evolving issues are shifting to the health insurance providers. You would be interested to see how they make their

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decisions in choosing which medications they cover. The government has a big hand in our health.

7.interview with Dr. David Owen

Currently employed at the University of Utah hospital as a family physician

Q: Have you had any visits from pharmaceutical reps?

A: Yes I have seen many pharmaceutical reps but not recently

Q: Why is that?

A: University of Utah does not allow reps to come to our hospital any more. They now have a physician whose full time position is to research medications for the hospital.

Q: When you were getting visited by pharmaceutical reps did you feel like you were being influenced by them?

A: I thought for a while that they weren't influencing me. One day though I had a patient that did not have the money to pay for any of the medications I could think of. All of the medications the reps had been promoting were going through my head but they were all around \$250 a refill. I finally asked another doctor if they knew of a good medication. He pointed out that there was a generic brand version of the medications that was \$5 a refill. It should have been an obvious medication for me to prescribe but all I could think of were the medications the reps had been promoting.

Q: What types of things would the pharmaceutical reps do to promote their medications

A: The reps would do many different things and they would come often. they would take us out for lunch or dinner, they would give us gifts, they would give us free samples to give out. they would even have getaway resorts sometimes.