

Survey: Majority of Physicians Have Industry Ties

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
New York Bureau

Nearly all physicians have ties to the pharmaceutical or device industries ranging from accepting drug samples to serving on a speakers' bureau, according to a survey of physicians across six specialties.

The study found that 94% of physicians surveyed reported some type of relationship with industry. The most frequently cited interaction (83%) was receiving food in the workplace. A majority of physicians surveyed (78%) also reported accepting drug samples.

Fewer physicians, about 35%, reported accepting reimbursement for admission to continuing medical education meetings or other meeting-related expenses, and 28% said they received payments from industry for professional services such as consulting, speaking, serving on an advisory board, or enrolling patients in clinical trials (N. Engl. J. Med. 2007;356:1742-50).

Physicians contacted by this news organization said that while the study raises important issues, it is not a cause for alarm since many of the industry interactions outlined in the study are essential and appropriate.

Eric G. Campbell, Ph.D., of the Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts Gen-

eral Hospital-Partners Health Care System in Boston, and his colleagues surveyed 3,167 physicians working in anesthesiology, cardiology, family practice, general surgery, internal medicine, and pediatrics.

Of those surveyed, 1,662 completed the questionnaire for an overall response rate of about 52%. The study was supported by a grant from the Institute on Medicine as a Profession.

The type and extent of reported interaction with representatives of the pharmaceutical and device industries varied by specialty, the researchers found. For example, cardiologists were more than twice as likely as family physicians to receive payments for professional services, such as consulting or work on clinical trials.

Family physicians held the most meetings with industry representatives, on average about 16 meetings per month, according to the study.

Practice setting also played a role in the interaction. Physicians in group practice were six times more likely to receive drug samples than were those working in hos-

pitals, clinics, or staff-model health maintenance organizations. Physicians in group practice were also three times as likely to receive gifts and nearly four times as likely to receive payments for professional services.

The study did not assess the appropriateness of the relationships with industry; however, the researchers concluded that the variations in relationships by specialty may indicate a need for guidelines that are specific to specialties and practice settings.

In an interview, Dr. James King, president-elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians said, "I don't think it's a major cause for concern."

Dr. King said he was not surprised by the survey findings, especially since it is a common practice for physicians to accept drug samples in an effort to save their patients money. Most practices are likely operating within the guidelines set out by the American Medical Association, he said. The AMA guidelines recommend that gifts should primarily have a benefit to patients and should not be of substantial value. For example, modest meals and textbooks are ac-

ceptable under the AMA guidelines, but cash payments should not be accepted.

The relationship with industry should continue to be watched and addressed, said Dr. King, and he recommended that physicians review their own ethical guidelines from time to time and refuse to accept any gift that would inappropriately influence their prescribing habits.

The main responsibility of physicians who do have relationships with industry is to ensure that patients' interests always come first and to disclose any financial conflicts, Dr. Jack Lewin, CEO of the American College of Cardiology, said in an interview.

ACC has a policy requiring disclosure of industry relationships for anyone involved in the group's activities, he said. "We really do have a firewall."

However, many of the relationships between cardiologists and industry are necessary and appropriate, he said, since industry is the main source of research on new treatments.

But more can be done to reduce concerns about potential conflict of interest, Dr. Lewin said. For example, an increase in the number of publicly funded independent reviews of drugs and devices and increases in federal research funding would help to clarify some of the gray areas of cardiovascular care, he said. ■

Physicians in group practice were three times as likely to take gifts and nearly four times as likely to receive payments for professional services.

PRODUCTS

Enjuvia for Vaginal Dryness

Enjuvia (synthetic conjugated estrogens, B) is approved for the treatment of moderate to severe vaginal dryness and pain with intercourse, and symptoms of vulvar and vaginal atrophy associated with menopause. Enjuvia is approved in a new tablet strength, 0.9 mg. For more information, contact Barr Pharmaceuticals Inc. by visiting www.barrpharmaceuticals.com.

T-Shirts Available for Wound Care

SilverSeal X-Shirts are available for the management of wounds and burns on the upper torso and upper arms. These medical-grade T-shirts are made of 90% cotton and 10% X-Static silver fiber. The sustained release of silver cations provides the skin with an antimicrobial barrier. For more information, contact Noble Biomaterials Inc. by calling 877-978-2842.

Wipes Now Kill More Microorganisms

Super Sani-Cloth Germicidal Disposable Wipes now kill rotavirus, human coronavirus, ESBL-producing *E. coli* and *Burkholderia cepacia*, in addition to more than a dozen other microorganisms. For more information or to purchase wipes, contact Professional Disposables International at www.pdipdi.com.

New Twinrix Dosing Schedule

The Food and Drug Administration has approved an accelerated dosing schedule for Twinrix (Hepatitis A Vaccine [Inactivated] and Hepatitis B [Recombinant] Vaccine). Three doses can be administered at 0, 7, 21-30 days, followed by a booster at 12 months, according to GlaxoSmithKline. Twinrix was approved for adults in 2001, on a 0-, 1-, and 6-month schedule. For more information, visit www.gskvaccines.com.

Web-Based EMR Service Offered

A new Web site is offering an Internet-based electronic medical records system that needs no special software purchase. Subscription plans vary and are available at an annual or monthly rate. For more information, visit www.docpatient.com.

Laser and Pulsed Light System

The StarLux 500 platform is available for nonablative skin resurfacing, soft tissue coagulation, and permanent hair reduction, as well as the treatment of leg veins, pigmented lesions, vascular lesions, and acne.

Different application-specific handpieces can be attached to the compact base unit. For more information, contact Palomar Medical Technologies by visiting www.palomarmedical.com.

Chlorascrub Swabs Available for Kits

Chlorascrub Swabs, formulated with 3.15% chlorhexidine gluconate and 70% isopropyl alcohol, are available for inclusion in first aid kits, and for kit manufacturers. They are manufactured by PDI, the health care division of Nice-Pak Products Inc. For more information, visit www.pdipdi.com.

F Y I

Skin Care Web Site Launched

A new Web site offers information on the treatment and management of aging skin. The site, www.agingwithbeauty.com, gives information on techniques such as microdermabrasion and chemical peels, and offers tips on slowing the aging process. It is sponsored by Sanofi-Aventis.

Quality Reporting Questions Answered

More than 50 frequently asked questions about the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative are available on the Web site of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Visit www.cms.hhs.gov/PQRI

and scroll down to the "Related Links Inside CMS" section. Click on the "All PQRI FAQs" link to access the list.

Overview of Covering the Uninsured

The Alliance for Health Reform is offering an overview of how health coverage is obtained. "Health Care Coverage in America: Understanding the Issues and Proposed Solutions," includes topics such as who is uninsured, approaches to covering the uninsured, and coverage proposals. Go to www.allhealth.org/publications/uninsured/health_care_coverage_in_america_2007_54.pdf to download.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Abbott Laboratories		Graceway Pharmaceuticals, LLC	
Humira	23-28	Atopiclair	83
Allergan, Inc.		Medicis Pharmaceutical Corporation	
Botox	30-32	Solodyn	16a-16b
Juvederm	55	Ziana	32a-32b, 33
Astellas Pharma US, Inc.		OrthoNeutrogena	
Amevive	36a-36d	Retin-A Micro	3-4
Barrier Therapeutics, Inc.		PCA Advanced Skin Care Systems	
Xolegel	20a-20b	Anti-redness serum	75
Vusion	68a-68b	PharmaDerm	
Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals, Inc.		Oxistat	35-36
Yaz	41-42	Cutivate	71-72
CollaGenex Pharmaceuticals, Inc.		SkinMedica, Inc.	
Oracea	66-68	Desonate	59-60
CORIA Laboratories, Ltd.		Spear Dermatology Products, Inc.	
Salex Shampoo	7-8	Tretinoin	73-74
Cloderm	77-78	Stiefel Laboratories, Inc.	
CynoSure		Corporate	14
Cynergy	39	Revale	18-19
DUSA Pharmaceuticals, Inc.		Sarna Original	29
ClindaReach	52a-52b, 53	Sarna Sensitive	47
Ferndale Laboratories		MimyX	51-52
Locoid Lipoderm	14-15, 43-44	ZNP Bar	63
Galderma Laboratories, L.P.		Rosac Wash	81
MetroGel	5-6	Duac	87-88
Differin	11-12	Travel Tech Mohs Services, Inc.	
Clobex	56a-56b	Corporate	10
		Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc.	
		Enbrel	44a-44d, 45