

Should Clinicians be Allowed to Accept Gifts/Honoraria/Consulting Fees From Anyone?

Kayla Richardson^{1*}, Emily Crossley²

¹Undergraduate Student, The Neuropsychiatric Patient, Department of Neurosciences and Psychiatry, College of Medicine and Life Sciences, 3000 Arlington Avenue, The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH 43615

²Masters Student, Bioinformatics Track, Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology, College of Medicine and Life Sciences, 3000 Arlington Avenue, The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH 43615

Email: makayla.richardson@rockets.utoledo.edu

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Essay Prompt

Should clinicians be allowed to accept gifts/honoraria/consulting fees from anyone? What would be lost if physicians could not work with such companies? What would be gained? Please write an essay focused on this dilemma. Be sure to consider the patient we saw in class with a DBS device who was doing very well, as well as the patient with opiate use disorder who had suffered considerably (keep in mind Big Pharma made the opiate epidemic worse with Oxycontin).

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A gift is an object or service given to another person without compensation. Many pharmaceutical companies will provide gifts to physicians so that they can prescribe or promote their drug. Some patients may give a fruit basket or coffee to their doctors in gratitude for treating their condition. If physicians could not accept gifts, there may be a loss in the relationship between consumers and physicians. At the same time, it is also possible that the quality of care could increase. Clinicians should be allowed to accept gifts, to an extent.

Modern interactions between clinicians and pharmaceutical companies include representative interactions, gifts, and dinners to convince a

clinician to prescribe their drug. These incentives are normal interactions. There are often cases where clinicians did not know a drug existed, and it can help dozens of patients that they see. However, there are people who abuse this power. There are clinicians who are being influenced by pharmaceutical companies to only prescribe their drug. The situation may occur when a patient no longer had the ability to see their options. When a patient goes to the doctor, they should be able to find something that helps, not be pushed to try a medication that is the most beneficial to their doctor's wallet. If clinicians were no longer able to accept gifts, there would be less bias towards a certain drug. This means that if a clinician were to

prefer one drug over another, it would be because it has actual benefits rather than it being the one that gives them the most money. As patients would not be constricted by their doctors preferred medication paths, there could be an increase in the quality of care.

One example of the gift dilemma having a negative impact is the opioid crisis. Opioids are synthetically produced pain relievers. They are prescribed to treat pain from injury or surgery (1). Initially, this new class of drug was promoted as a new pain killer with little side effects. Physicians were often encouraged by pharmaceutical companies to prescribe opioids. However, time has shown that opioids are highly addictive. Opioids can cross the blood brain barrier, a selectively permeable membrane between the brain and the blood vessels surrounding it, which changes the chemistry within the brain (2). More and more people have become addicted to these drugs, creating what is now called the opioid crisis. Now, physicians must screen patients for family history of substance use disorders before prescribing opioids. However, those who do not pass the screening turn to opioids' natural counterparts. Drugs such as opium and heroin come from plants and are often sold illegally to people who cannot receive opioids through the medical system (3). The modern opioid crisis stems from the original encouragement of prescribing opioids (4). If pharmaceutical companies had not rushed to give doctors rewards for prescribing their new drug, there is a large possibility that the very high chance of overdose would have been discovered sooner. Research takes time, and it should not be rushed when a reward is presented.

Doctors swear an oath to not harm their patients. Whether or not they abide by their oath is up to their moral and ethical character. Sometimes, helping people is not enough motivation for clinicians. Without motivation, clinicians could grow indifferent to providing care to their patients. There is no way to predict what could occur if clinicians could no longer accept gifts

unless it truly happens. Ultimately, a medical provider must be ethical and stand by their oath to do no harm, and to provide medication based upon need, not a gift from a company.

References

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