

ETH-004

The Relationship of the Profession to the Health Product Industry: The Wisconsin Medical Society supports the following policy on accepting gifts from those who provide health products prescribed by physicians, including the pharmaceutical and device industries.

Physicians shall accept no gifts from any provider of products that they prescribe to their patients such as personal items, office supplies, food, travel and time costs, or payment for participation in online CME. A complete ban eases the burdens of compliance, biased decision making, and patient distrust.

Medical philosophers from ancient to modern affirm the priority of patient interest as the cornerstone of medical professionalism and the first principle in resolving conflict of interest (COI) questions. High quality patient care and health outcomes depend on patient trust in physician advice. COI is ubiquitous in human relationships, including the patient-physician relationship, therefore, the profession and each physician every day must strive to acknowledge and manage COI in order to prevent avoidable bias in medical decision making. A physician's prescribing decision should be based on the best evidence available.

The reciprocal giving of gifts is an ancient human practice and likely has survival value by reinforcing social bonds. Health product companies have long offered gifts to physicians and the profession has long denied being influenced by these gifts. By distinguishing among possible gifts according to monetary value or value to patient care, ethicists have attempted to estimate the risk that specific gifts could bias medical decision making—no doubt these distinctions have reduced the frequency of outrageous gifts, however, it is becoming apparent that any gift from a product provider to a product prescriber risks biased decision making, and at least, risks loss of patient trust in physician advice. Some conflicts can't be avoided, but *avoidance of unnecessary conflicts* is the cornerstone strategy of professional conflict management.

An article found in *JAMA* 2006;295:429-433 has renewed the western world's conversation about the commercial relationship between health product industries and the profession of medicine. Following their recommendations, the Society affirms the following examples of ethical professional behavior.

- The direct provision of drug samples to patients should be limited and, when possible, should be replaced by a system of vouchers for evidence-based drug choices.
- Physicians serving on formulary committees who have any kind of commercial relationship with a health product company shall disclose any such relationship and recuse themselves from the formulary process, as necessary to avoid bias.
- The Accredited Council for Continuing Medical Education's (ACCME) Standards for Commercial Support, as adopted by the Wisconsin Medical Society, will be complied with by all accredited Wisconsin CME providers.
- Physicians should not serve as members of speaker bureaus for health product companies or their contractees.
- Physicians should not allow their names to be listed as authors for articles written by health product company employees, a practice called "ghostwriting."

- Since ethical collaboration between the profession and the health product industry is essential for the continued development of health products, high-integrity consulting and research relationships shall be strongly encouraged. However, to avoid such relationships being tantamount to a gift, such relationships shall be based in contracts for specific “deliverables” in return for just compensation.

The following office sign is available for members of the Wisconsin Medical Society:

Office Sign:

TO OUR PATIENTS

To uphold the highest standards of our Profession,
To ensure our advice is based solely on what’s best for you, and
To enable your highest level of trust in our advice,
We follow the recommendations of the Wisconsin Medical Society,
And accept no gifts from any provider of a product that we prescribe or recommend to you.