Response to "Interactions Between Pharmaceutical Representatives and Doctors in Training: A Thematic Review"

To the Editor:—The findings of Zipkin and Steinman's review that residents have frequent interactions with pharmaceutical representatives and that the residents view the interactions to be favorable is hardly surprising.¹ The systematic "branding" of physicians begins in the earliest stages of medical training. Medical students receive lunches, pens, and books given by drug companies throughout their clinical training, and come to expect industry freebies as an entitlement.² Required "educational" sessions for clinical students are often sponsored by drug companies. At medical conferences, we witness our colleagues and mentors queued up for the trinkets and gadgets handed out by industry—even though the policies of the sponsoring professional medical organizations proscribe such behavior.³ Are ethics are merely words printed in esteemed journals? How are we, the next generation of physicians, to react to the hypocrisy of those scenes?

The American Medical Student Association (AMSA), an organization of 60,000 physicians-in-training, started the PharmFree Campaign in 2002 to educate and train our members to professionally and ethically interact with drug companies.⁴ As one of very few major medical organizations that is completely independent of pharmaceutical sponsorship and advertisements, AMSA believes that students should think critically before accepting drug company gifts, and that medical schools have a responsibility to provide formal instruction for students to assess such contacts. Perhaps these efforts are the beginning of our profession restoring its principles as one that advocates for patients, not one that can be bought by drug companies.—**Leana S. Wen, BS, National President and Christopher McCoy, MD, Legislative Affairs Director, American Medical Student Association, Reston, Va, USA.**

REFERENCES

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3. **Chren MM, Landefeld S, Murray T.** Doctors, drug companies, and gifts. *JAMA.* 1989;262:3448–51.
4. **AMSA's PharmFree Campaign.** <http://www.amsa.org/prof/pharmfree.cfm> (accessed 28 July 2005).

In Reply:—We concur with Wen and McCoy that the influence of industry begins at the earliest stages of medical training. Medical schools are uniquely positioned to educate future doctors about the effects of this influence, and to promote the formation of evidence-based prescribing habits. The American Medical Student Association (AMSA) stance on this issue represents not only a statement of principle, but models behavior that differs from the institutional practices of many medical schools and teaching hospitals. Role modeling by institutions and opinion leaders can have a major impact on the development of professional norms among trainees.¹ For this reason, we encourage teaching institutions and physician preceptors not only to implement curricula on physician-industry interactions, but to reflect upon and modify their own behavior to better match the norms they encourage in their students.^{2,3}—**Daniella A. Zipkin, MD, California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco, Calif, USA; Michael A. Steinman, MD, University of California, San Francisco, Calif, USA.**

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