LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Discussing Pharmaceutical Gifts

To the Editor:—Dr. So, in his editorial discussing pharmaceutical gifts, addresses three approaches that could limit industry influence on prescribing.¹ He calls for increases in ethical guidance, skills for critically appraising claims, and availability of alternatives to drug company information. These would most

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likely increase rational prescribing decisions made solely on the basis of efficacy, adverse effects, contraindications, and cost. I suspect, however, that prescribing practices will not improve dramatically unless we take advantage of the lessons drug company detailing could teach us about how to alter physician behavior. The pharmaceutical industry has been remarkably successful at accessing the “prescription-writing center of the brain.”² We must do a better job of identifying what are effective modes of knowledge diffusion and incorporating them into all levels of medical education such that better bridges are built between our evidence base and our prescribing behaviors.—**DANIEL B. STRYER, MD**, Center for Outcomes and Effectiveness Research, Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, Rockville, Md.

REFERENCES

1. So AD. Free gifts: redundancy or conundrum? *J Gen Intern Med*. 1998;13(3):213–5. Editorial.
2. Wolfe SM. Drug advertisements that go straight to the hippocampus. *Lancet*. 1996;348:632.

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