

14th May 2024

Should the ICGP accept pharmaceutical industry sponsorship: FAQ's

Authors:

ICGP Members: Kieran Harkin, Susan Smith, Mark Murphy

Research advisor: James Larkin PhD

What problems are caused by pharmaceutical industry sponsorship of medical education?

- The pharmaceutical industry invests heavily in medical education in order to develop a relationship with prescribers and to influence their prescribing patterns.¹
- Engagement between pharmaceutical companies and prescribers is associated with lower quality prescribing.² A 2017 systematic review² found a significant association between interactions with pharmaceutical companies and changes in prescribing behaviours.
- Pharmaceutical industry marketing techniques are designed in such a way that prescribers are unaware that they are being manipulated and influenced. A systematic review of five studies found that physicians generally believed that they were not influenced by industry interactions but that their colleagues were.³ For example, a survey of German doctors found that only 6% of respondents believed they were influenced by industry interactions but 21% of respondents believed others were influenced.⁴
- A 2018 Canadian study has found that the pharmaceutical industry spends more on promotion than on research and development.⁵

Our College receives much of its funding as “unrestricted” grants. Does this mean that the college will not be influenced by sponsorship?

- Research has shown that even ‘unrestricted’ funding for medical activities provides advantages to the sponsor and ultimately facilitates marketing to prescribers.⁶
- A qualitative study of Irish GPs found that 'unrestricted' grants provided companies with indirect influence over educational activities and opportunities to market to GPs.⁷
- ‘Unrestricted’ funding can also indirectly influence organisations’ stances on important issues. A systematic review of industry funding of patient organisations found that industry funded organisations generally supported sponsors’ interests.⁸

Has any other organisation ever stopped accepted pharmaceutical industry funding before?

- The Irish College of Psychiatry has not accepted pharmaceutical industry sponsorship since 2010.⁹ The College stated that 'Research in this area has overwhelmingly showed that clinicians are influenced by the pharmaceutical industry’s marketing strategies which have an impact on prescribing practises.¹⁹ However, the Irish College of Psychiatry charges €330 for a two-day conference.¹⁰
- Some Irish GP practices, CME groups, and post-graduate training programmes have stopped accepting pharmaceutical industry funding.⁷

References

1. Lo B, Field MJ. Principles for identifying and assessing conflicts of interest. *conflict of interest in medical research, education, and practice*. National Academies Press (US); 2009.
2. Brax H, Fadlallah R, Al-Khaled L, et al. Association between physicians' interaction with pharmaceutical companies and their clinical practices: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PloS one*. 2017;12(4):e0175493. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0175493
3. Fickweiler F, Fickweiler W, Urbach E. Interactions between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry generally and sales representatives specifically and their association with physicians' attitudes and prescribing habits: a systematic review. *BMJ open*. 2017;7(9):e016408.
4. Lieb K, Brandtönes S. A survey of german physicians in private practice about contacts with pharmaceutical sales representatives. *Dtsch Arztebl Int*. Jun 2010;107(22):392-8. doi:10.3238/arztebl.2010.0392
5. Lexchin J. Pharmaceutical company spending on research and development and promotion in Canada, 2013-2016: a cohort analysis. *Journal of pharmaceutical policy and practice*. 2018;11:1-6.
6. Institute of Medicine Committee on Conflict of Interest. The National Academies Collection: Reports funded by National Institutes of Health. In: Lo B, Field MJ, eds. *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice*. National Academies Press (US); 2009.
7. Larkin J, Pericin I, Collins M, Smith SM, Byrne D, Moriarty F. GPs' perceptions of their relationship with the pharmaceutical industry: a qualitative study. *BJGP Open*. Oct 2021;5(5)doi:10.3399/bjgpo.2021.0057
8. Fabbri A, Parker L, Colombo C, et al. Industry funding of patient and health consumer organisations: systematic review with meta-analysis. *BMJ (Clinical research ed)*. 2020;368
9. College of Psychiatrists of Ireland. The Relationship between Psychiatrists, the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland and the Pharmaceutical Industry Accessed 13 September, 2023. <https://www.irishpsychiatry.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CPsychI-Position-Paper-Psychiatrists-relationship-with-Pharmaceutical-Companies-20-03-13.pdf>
10. College of Psychiatrists of Ireland. Personal Communication. 2024.