

[From the Washington Post, Nov. 18, 1968]

36 MEDICAL STUDENTS REJECT INDUSTRY GIFTS—OFFERED \$25 KITS

Thirty-six medical students in Cleveland have publicly bitten the hand of the drug industry, which long has been feeding gifts to prospective doctors everywhere.

The students, who comprise two-fifths of the second-year class at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, rejected a drug maker's gifts of instrument bags of simulated-leather and diagnostic tools.

The bags would retail for about \$25, one of the students estimated. He valued the tools at a few dollars.

The rejection is a dramatic symptom of increasing concern in the Nation's medical schools over the practice of presenting gifts to future doctors. Beyond that, the student action is a symptom of an activist ferment which in several ways—including volunteer work in the ghettos and understaffed hospitals—is challenging the rockbound conservatism of much of organized medicine.

In a letter to the Nov. 14 New England Journal of Medicine, the 36 students said that "merely returning the gifts is not a sufficient action . . ."

They said they had told the drug company, which was unidentified, that the bags and tools "are not gifts but rather are inappropriate advertisements."

Their letter to the firm also said that "all but the most naive realize that your motivation . . . is to influence our future choice of drugs," so that usually higher-priced trade-name products will be prescribed.

Last year on Capitol Hill, two medical educators testified that drug companies they did not identify give some graduating medical students and their wives free trips to New York City.

And in 1961, the question about whether drug company gifts to students and medical organizations are "paola" was raised by Dr. Charles D. May, a leading pediatrician, in the Journal of Medical Education.

The article, entitled "Selling Drugs by 'Educating' Physicians," estimated that in 1959 the makers of prescription medicines spent \$750 million on promotional activities—more than 3½ times the \$200 million available in 1957 to all American medical schools for educational purposes.

JANUARY 31, 1969.

ELI LILLY & Co.

GENTLEMEN: A year ago, as first year medical students, we invited drug companies to provide us with a variety of instruments, like those commonly distributed at most medical schools. As second year students, we now feel we made a mistake, and think it proper to return the instruments for the following reason.

We believe an unhealthy relationship exists between the drug industry and the medical profession. The profession is largely responsible, because it does not maintain a proper distance from the industry. This distance is essential for the doctor's objectivity. Since the doctor is in a unique economic position, namely that of directing what the consumer shall buy, strict objectivity is his obligation to the patient.

This objectivity is endangered when medical students accept instruments. Naturally, such gifts engender in the student a sense of familiarity and gratitude toward the houses than can afford to give them. In a subtle but real way, these attitudes can undermine the critical objectivity which must underly both the medical and economic decisions of prescription writing. In an analogous situation, it is universally recognized that an official who awards contracts should not accept gifts from bidders.

It is also clear that the cost of these instruments and other elaborate promotional campaigns is paid by the consumer. We view our action in returning the instruments as a signal to the industry that as future doctors we would applaud a deescalation in the ever-mounting tide of promotional campaigns.

Our aim is to establish good habits for ourselves early in our training and to promote discussion of the relationship between the drug industry, the medical profession and the patient. We support the thirty-six Case Western Reserve medical students who first returned drug company instruments and urge others to follow their example.

Forty-Five Students of Harvard Medical School.