

[From the Boston Globe, Feb. 1, 1969]

STUDENTS REJECT DRUG CO. GIFTS

(By Carl M. Cobb)

Nearly half of the sophomore class at Harvard Medical School has decided it was a mistake to accept medical instruments and doctor's "black bags" from drug companies. They are shipping the gifts back.

The 45 students believe an unhealthy relationship between doctors and the nation's drug companies has developed and do not wish to undermine their objectivity or create conflicts of interest by accepting the gifts.

More than \$2000 worth of free stethoscopes, tuning forks and other free items from the Eli Lilly drug company are being returned by the 45 students.

Richard Pohl and Allen Binder, who organized the movement, said the students receive a wide range of "gifts" from drug companies during their medical training. "We get free records, text books, Summer training grants, drug samples as well as these kits. Naturally such gifts engender in the student a sense of familiarity and gratitude toward the drug houses that can afford to give them," Pohl explained.

The students are afraid these subtle influences and changes in attitude "can undermine the critical objectivity which must underlie both the medical and economic decisions of prescription writing."

Binder said the mass equipment return is intended as a symbolic gesture that will prompt other students and doctors "to think twice before accepting gifts from drug houses."

The students are also concerned about the cost of this kind of "subtle advertising" and the fact that it is ultimately paid by the consumer. There are estimates, Pohl said, that the drug industry spends between \$3000 and \$5000 on every physician in the nation every year in advertising.

In a letter to the Eli Lilly Co., the students said "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."

Pohl said similar movements are underway at Tufts Medical School and other institutions across the country where students are, he said, growing increasingly disenchanted with the pervasive influence of the pharmaceutical industry at the expense of the consumer.

Binder said the problem is all the more difficult because the consumer has no say in the product he purchases and can apply no consumer pressure to bring down prices with his purchasing practices. "The doctor prescribes the drug, he makes the decisions, but does not pay the bill."

[From the Washington Post, Feb. 1, 1969]

STUDENTS VETO GIFTS OF DRUG FIRM

(By Morton Mintz)

More than a third of the second-year class at Harvard Medical School cut an economic umbilical cord with the drug industry yesterday.

They piled gifts from a drug maker—percussion hammers, stethoscopes, tape measures, tuning forks and vinyl black bags—on a couch in the Boston dormitory room of Richard L. Pohl, of Lynbrook, N.Y., one of their leaders.

Then a press conference was called to explain that the gifts will be returned to the company as a symbolic protest against "an unhealthy relationship" between the industry and the medical profession.

PRECEDENT CITED

In a letter to the manufacturer, 45 medical and dental students—out of a class of 125—said that a doctor should not accept gifts from a drug house for the same reason "that an official who awards contracts should not accept gifts from bidders."

The action is the second of its kind. The first was taken last November in Cleveland by 36 second-year medical students at Case Western Reserve University.