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SOME MEDICAL STUDENTS SHOCK DRUG COMPANIES BY SENDING BACK GIFTS

REBELS SAY MANUFACTURERS TRY TO "BUY" THEM; A FIRM DENIES ANY SELFISH MOTIVE

(By Earl C. Gottschalk, Jr.)

Inside the classroom, the medical student is sternly instructed in the ethics of his profession. Outside it, he is showered with gifts and favors by drug manufacturers building goodwill for the day when the young man will be writing prescriptions.

Freshman year brings free medical textbooks and plastic models of body organs. In sophomore year, there is a free bag of diagnostic instruments. And in senior year the blooming physician is likely to be invited—with his wife—for an expense-paid weekend in New York City to "see the plant" of a major drug maker or two.

"In the old days we didn't do much thinking about all of this," says one senior physician. The gifts, in other words, were accepted. But lately, to the embarrassment of the drug makers, a number of young doctors-in-training have been rejecting the gifts—and giving the drug companies a sharp lecture on ethics to boot.

"The drug industry should realize that these students are a new breed," says Dr. Joseph W. Gardella, associate dean for student affairs at Harvard medical school. Dr. J. L. Caughey, associate dean for student affairs at the medical school of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, says the drug companies "are alienating a significant segment of the student body at the present time."

The gift issue—which sometimes arises in other fields, such as journalism—has caused quite a stir in the medical world. Prestigious publications like the New England Journal of Medicine are publishing letters on both sides of the controversy.

NO THANK YOU

The grass-roots rebellion began last fall when 36 students at Case Western Reserve returned their gift bags of instruments to Eli Lilly & Co. of Indianapolis—the donor of that gift—with a tart letter about conflict of interest. Forty-five Harvard students followed suit, and the revolt soon spread to the medical schools at Columbia University and the University of Virginia.

The gifts in question are more than tokens. One medical school professor estimates that the average student receives \$500 worth of gifts and free drugs during his days at medical school. If the student's wife needs a birth control pill prescription, or his mother-in-law requires diabetes medication, he merely has to tell a drug company "detail man" (salesman) to get the drugs free.

The gifts continue when he graduates, with drug companies offering free dinners or cocktail parties at medical meetings. Dr. Donald H. Atlas, a Chicago physician, declared in a letter to the New England Journal: "The ubiquitous blandishments of the excessively profitable pharmaceutical industry begin in medical school and continue inexorably even beyond our retirement. I should not be surprised to meet a detail man in Abaddon or Nirvana."

Clifford Crump, a 22-year-old freshman at Case Western Reserve, is one of the medical students determined to resist the blandishments. "Moral outrage" explains the returned gifts, he says, asserting that the students "feel the drug companies are trying to buy them."

Some of the rebels, Mr. Crump asserts, have the patient in mind. These students, he says, believe the drug companies "make too much on profit on products, spend too much on advertising compared to research and misuse the patent laws by merely developing variations of the same drug rather than new drug entities."

THE PATIENTS' WELFARE

At Harvard, Dr. Gardella detects similar sentiments. "Students believe the patient is a pawn between the doctors and the drug companies," he says. "They feel the responsibility for the patients' welfare—holding down the cost of drugs—has gone begging." Two Harvard students who wrote the New England Journal said: "The cost of these instruments and other elaborate promotional campaigns is paid by the consumer."

One drug official recently was quite candid about the gift-giving, Dr. Harold Upjohn, vice president of medical affairs for Upjohn Co., Kalamazoo, Mich., told