

It is clear from the incomplete information above that the pharmaceutical companies are quite active both in medical schools and in medical students organizations.

C. Student attitudes toward the pharmaceutical industry

To present a broad but incomplete picture of the degree of pharmaceutical company activities related to medical students with limited preparation is difficult—to presume to present definitive testimony on student attitudes toward these activities is almost impossible. I do so with trepidation, based only on extensive contacts with my fellow students, and with the recognition that there is the broadest diversity of opinion among medical students on this issue—as on all issues.

A small but growing and well-publicized minority of medical students are refusing certain gifts by pharmaceutical companies and returning them. Some feel that drug companies are trying to buy them, others that excessive costs for promotion and substantial profits by the pharmaceutical industry serve to cheat the consumer. And, finally, some feel that attacking the pharmaceutical industry is a successful way of confronting a “decadent, bourgeoisie, capitalistic society.”

The vast majority of students, however, do accept gratuities, not passively, but by requesting certain items or by picking up the equipment or books where they are being distributed.

There is no question that many of the gifts are of significant educational value to medical students, and they consequently accept them readily. The black bags, stethoscopes and other equipment are also accepted since they represent items which otherwise would have to be purchased by students with limited incomes (made more limited by a $8\frac{1}{2}\%$ prime rate, a failing Guaranteed Loan Program and the imminent danger of decreased funds from Health Professions Education Act Loan Program), and rapidly increasing education and living expenditures. The vast majority of students I have spoken with do not feel they are compromising their professional ethics by accepting gifts that are educational or utilitarian in nature.

The issue of gratuities, however, has now been raised and there will be an increasing number of students who will be forced to more carefully define their own ethics in the context of the arguments being raised. There probably will be a larger number of gifts returned next year.

It is SAMA's policy that it is undesirable for our profession to be receptive to promotional activity that does not contribute directly to the physician's or medical student's scientific or professional knowledge and thus has no foreseeable benefit to the health care recipient. We acknowledge not only the right of an individual physician or student to refuse gratuities that do not serve an educational purpose, but his responsibility to do so.

We feel it is the duty of the physician to use his professional discretion and judgment in choosing the appropriate drug, not only in regards to quality but to cost.

We believe that, as the issues involved are rationally discussed by medical students across the country, a more discriminating approach toward gratuities will rapidly develop. There is no reason to believe that students who have accepted questionable gratuities are “immoral” or “dishonest” but rather that they have only recently been confronted by these issues. These students, who by the thousands are beginning to develop a new social awareness, are not insensitive to either the ethics of their profession or the needs of their communities. I have seen more than once a black bag in the hands of a medical student headed to work in a student community health project in the inner city.

At our recent national convention, there was much ascerbic rhetoric directed by a few medical students at the exhibiting drug company representatives and picketing and demonstrations outside of the exhibit hall. Even with these demonstrations, and the resolve of the House of Delegates to look into “abuses by the pharmaceutical companies” in a rational and unbiased way, there still has been nothing to demonstrate anything but concern for communication and dialogue by the pharmaceutical companies.

It is also my belief that the pharmaceutical companies will come to recognize the changes occurring in medical students across the country. They have continued to increase their support to community-oriented projects and have, without exception, accepted the de-emphasis of funding of social functions of our organization and begun to shift their support to educational programs. To date, there has been no “retaliation” for the criticism they have received from those SAMA members who disagree with their point of view, and we expect none.