Associations Say No to Industry Funding
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Associations Say No to Industry Funding

Bridget M. Kuehn

Amid increasing calls in the medical community to eliminate industry bias—real or perceived—from medical education, some professional associations are choosing to forgo industry funding related to educational activities. At the same time, legislators are stepping up efforts to expose conflicts of interest in the medical profession and to provide alternative funding for physician education.

In late March, the board of trustees of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) voted to phase out industry-supported symposia and meals at the organization’s annual meetings. Nada L. Stotland, MD, MPH, president of the association, said the decision to end industry funding of medical education has been in the works for more than a year. In March 2008, before starting her tenure as president, Stotland convened a working group to assess all funding the organization was receiving from pharmaceutical companies and what industry funding could be eliminated.

Meanwhile, at the annual scientific meeting of American College of Cardiology (ACC), held in late March in Orlando, Fla, attendees received bags and lanyards free of the usual corporate advertisements. In past years, the organization had allowed sponsors to pay to advertise on bags, lanyards, and data cards distributed to attendees. In 2008, sponsors paid the organization nearly $300 000 for this privilege, according to the college. But at the 2009 meeting remained on the ACC’s Web site (http://www.acc.org/about/support/2009CorporateSupport.pdf). Officials at the college could not be reached for comment at press time.

These changes come as the wider medical community and the public grapple with how to mitigate conflicts of interest in medicine. In addition to investigating undisclosed financial ties between individual physicians and industry, Sen Chuck Grassley (R, Iowa) has turned his attention to the impact of industry funding on medical associations. In July 2008, Grassley requested an accounting of the APA’s finances. Earlier, in March 2008, the senator sent a letter to the American College of Cardiology expressing concern about the “appearance of a conflict of interest” related to payments the group received from Merck and Schering Plough and a press release the organization put out in response to the results of the Effect of Ezetimibe Plus Simvastatin Versus Simvastatin Alone on Atherosclerosis in the Carotid Artery (ENHANCE) trial. The ACC later clarified its statement on this trial.

In spring 2008, the American Medical Association’s (AMA’s) Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs issued a report recommending that individual physicians and medical institutions—including medical schools, teaching hospitals, and professional organizations—not accept industry funding for professional education, except for the demonstration of a new device or technique. The report ultimately was sent back to the council for revision, and the council and the AMA’s Council on Medical Education will be submitting complementary reports at the AMA’s annual meeting in June 2009.

Several leaders of medical organizations and other influential physicians, including the editor in chief of JAMA, recently published recommendations urging professional medical organizations to work toward eliminating industry funding entirely, except for journal advertising and pharmaceutical...
Combat Injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan Help Rewrite the Book on War Surgery

Carolyn J. Hildreth, MD

A new war surgery manual is being written every day in Iraq and Afghanistan by surgeons treating soldiers and civilians injured in these conflicts.

Like previous manuals from wartime, surgeons have been informed by the experiences of those on the front lines. The tactics of the opponent, the defenses available to the soldiers, and the tools available for diagnosis and treatment are shaping the current approaches used by physicians serving in modern conflicts, explained Rocco Armonda, MD, a neurosurgeon and colonel in the US Army. Armonda described his experience treating soldiers and civilians injured in the Iraq war at the 94th Scientific Assembly and Annual Meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA).

INFLUENCE OF WEAPONRY

The weapons used in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars inflict blast, bullet, and burn injuries, resulting in severe polytrauma, according to Alisa D. Gean, MD, another speaker at this RSNA lecture and a professor of radiology and biomedical imaging who served twice at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, the only US-owned tertiary care hospital outside the United States. This medical center is the primary facility receiving casualties of US military operations in Europe, southeast Asia, and the Middle East. It is the nearest treatment center and a large number of serious casualties from the current conflicts receive care there.

The weapons used in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, such as improvised explosive devices, inflict blast, bullet, and burn injuries that result in severe polytrauma.