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PATIENT CARE MUST BE PARAMOUNT WHEN DOCTORS WORK WITH INDUSTRY

The AMA has released new guidelines on doctors’ relationships with industry, an area of increasing but necessary interaction in our modern technological health system.

Doctors must work collaboratively with commercial entities directly involved in health care, however, patient care must always be the top priority.

This is particularly the case when the doctor benefits financially from the collaboration, AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“The overriding principle guiding doctors’ relationships with industry is the primacy of patient care,” Dr Bartone said.

“Public trust and confidence in the medical profession is essential for ensuring people access medical care.

“If people don’t trust doctors, they may seek care elsewhere, or not seek care at all. Either option may be detrimental to their health, and to wider public health.

“Patients and the wider community expect doctors to uphold their duty and put patients’ interests above their own personal interests, or the interests of industry.”

The AMA Guidelines define industry as “commercial entities directly involved with health care, such as those involved in the development, manufacture, and supply of healthcare products, and those involved in the provision of healthcare services”.

This includes, but is not limited to, the pharmaceutical industry, medical device and technology industry, other healthcare product suppliers, healthcare facilities, medical services such as pathology, radiology, and assisted reproductive technologies, and other health services such as pharmacy and physiotherapy.

“It is important that doctors and industry work collaboratively to improve health care by developing new therapeutic products, treatments, and services, and making them available to the community,” Dr Bartone said.

“In some cases, individual doctors and institutions may benefit financially. It is essential that doctors manage these relationships appropriately, to avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, which can undermine public confidence and trust in the medical profession.”

Dr Bartone said that doctors are a target for industry marketing, given the role they play in prescribing products, and the ban on advertising prescription medications in Australia.

“There are many products that only a doctor can prescribe,” Dr Bartone said.

“Doctors must be aware of the possible influence that industry marketing, including sponsored attendance at conferences, and being given product samples, can have on their prescribing behaviour, and take steps to minimise any influence.

“Doctors must also be aware that marketing may lead to patients requesting inappropriate medications and treatments.

“Doctors should be prepared to discuss such requests, explain why a certain medication or treatment is inappropriate for a particular patients, and only recommend therapies that are medically recommended.”

The AMA Guidelines on Doctors’ Relationships with Industry are at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/doctors-relationships-industry-2018>

Background

- Relationships between doctors and industry can take many forms, including being involved in industry-sponsored research involving patients, and post-marketing surveillance studies.
- Doctors may also attend scientific, educational, and continuing professional development meetings sponsored or supported by industry.
- Doctors may hold industry shares or similar options, or hold intellectual property rights in a medical device or similar product.
- Doctors may also receive product samples, dispense products, or meet with industry representatives.
- Doctors are a major focus of industry marketing, as many products require a prescription before being dispensed, and direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines is banned in Australia.
- Medical schools and other education bodies should be open and transparent about educational sessions provided by industry, and it should not be compulsory for medical students to attend any sessions or activities organised by industry.

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