

# LETTERS

## DATABASE OF PAYMENTS FROM INDUSTRY TO DOCTORS

# Interrupting the dark dance of bribery

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Dyer reported that a joint meeting of the Royal College of Physicians and *The BMJ* concluded that doctors should be obliged to adhere to a code of conduct on relationships with industry and to declare their interactions with drug and medical device companies on a publicly accessible searchable database.<sup>1</sup> Was a meeting necessary? What's next?

Little progress has been made over the past decade.<sup>2</sup> In the US, the Physician Sunshine Act was passed in 2010 (starting date for the recording of data 1 August 2013 and first deadline for reports 31 March 2014). The act requires “applicable” manufacturers of covered drugs, devices, biologicals, and medical supplies to report annually all payments and other transfers of value to physicians and teaching hospitals. However, the act is weakened by too many exclusions, such as foreign entities, certain medical education programmes, and indirect payments to speakers.<sup>3</sup>

In France, a publicly accessible searchable database has existed since June 2014.<sup>4</sup> However, it excludes contracts such as scientific presentations, “training,” advice, consultancies, and various collaborations in clinical research. At least we know who pays for the pizza.<sup>5</sup>

The matter deserves a European directive. This would be more useful than EEC No 1677/88, which set up an “extra class” for cucumbers with a bend of 10 mm per 10 cm of length.

Lastly, why restrict the issue to doctors? All healthcare professionals, medical journals, hospital managers, and teaching hospitals must be included. The American Medical Student Association has just showed us the way by analysing disclosure of potential conflicts of interest to the public by teaching hospitals. Only 19 of the 204 policies examined met model criteria and there are more than 1000 teaching hospitals in the US.<sup>6</sup>

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Dyer C. UK needs database of payments from industry to doctors, conference hears. *BMJ* 2014;349:g6197. (13 October.)
- 2 Wager E. How to dance with porcupines: rules and guidelines on doctors' relations with drug companies. *BMJ* 2003;326:1196.
- 3 Zick CJ, Cerundolo PA, Heuer T, Gorlach I. United States: the Physician Payment Sunshine Act final rule—a summary of key provisions. Mondaq, 2013. [www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/x/221584/Healthcare/The+Physician+Payment+Sunshine+Act+Final+Rule](http://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/x/221584/Healthcare/The+Physician+Payment+Sunshine+Act+Final+Rule).
- 4 Public database transparency—health. [www.transparence.sante.gouv.fr/](http://www.transparence.sante.gouv.fr/).
- 5 Moynihan R. Who pays for the pizza? Redefining the relationships between doctors and drug companies. 2: Disentanglement. *BMJ* 2003;326:1193.
- 6 American Medical Student Association. AMSA scorecard 2014: teaching hospitals. <http://teaching-hospitals.amsascorecard.org/>.

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