

# **Pitt, UPMC No. 1 in ethical dealings with drug firms**

By **Debra Erdley**  
TRIBUNE-REVIEW  
*Thursday, June 5, 2008*

The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and University of Pittsburgh Schools of Health Sciences might have the nation's strictest policies barring gifts and travel from the pharmaceutical industry, a recent study found.

The study by the national American Medical Student Association ranked Pitt at the top of 150 medical schools in a survey that evaluated policies regulating interaction with drug companies.

"This is part of a national movement, and it is important that we take a leadership role. ... We were really very pleased at the affirmation," said Dr. Barbara Barnes, associate vice chancellor of continuing medical education and industry relations at Pitt.

Barnes, who is also vice president for sponsored programs, research support and continuing medical education at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, helped develop the policies that were enacted in February. They govern approximately 60,000 UPMC employees, the faculty and students at Pitt's schools of health sciences and all outside drug company representatives that interact with them.

"There has been a lot of publicity in the media about conflicts with the pharmaceutical industry. We are developing and adhering to the highest ethical standards," Barnes said, adding that such standards enhance quality of care and patient safety and boost public confidence.

In addition to barring drug company gifts and travel, the Pitt-UPMC policies funnel all industry scholarship money into a centralized pool and require any outside consulting arrangements be pre-approved. The policies also established a centralized sample medication program that eliminates interaction between prescribers and drug company representatives.

A spokesman for the American Medical Student Association said U.S. medical schools have been slow to move on such issues. Only 21 of 150 institutions surveyed earned an A or B.

Allan Coukell, policy director for the nonprofit Boston-based Prescription Project, which helped to develop the study, predicted the leadership of institutions such as Pitt and the other A and B schools will "change the culture at medical schools."

"It is time to extricate marketing practices from medical education," said Dr. Brian Hurley, president of the American Medical Student Association. "By eliminating the gifts and the misleading information that pharma reps currently bring into our schools, hospitals and academic medical centers, physicians will be able to better practice evidence-based medicine, and that translates into better care for our patients."