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Stanford to Limit Drug Maker Financing

By [GARDINER HARRIS](#)

[Stanford University](#), concerned about the influence drug companies may have on medical education, is expected to announce Tuesday that it will severely restrict industry financing of doctors' continuing education at its medical school.

Nearly all doctors in the country must take annual refresher courses that drug makers have long paid for. While the industry says its money is intended solely to keep doctors up to date, critics charge that companies agree to support only classes that promote their products.

On Tuesday, Stanford plans to announce that it will no longer let drug and device companies specify which courses they wish to finance. Instead, companies will be asked to contribute only to a schoolwide pool of money that can be used for any class, even ones that never mention a company's products.

With its approach, Stanford becomes the sixth major medical school — including those at the universities of Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Colorado, Kansas and California Davis — to form schoolwide pools for university contributions to medical education, according to the Prescription Project, a nonprofit organization that largely opposes industry financing of medical education. The [Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#), meanwhile, has banned all industry support for its doctor classes.

Dr. David Korn, chief scientific officer of the Association of American Medical Colleges, said Stanford's new policy was "an extremely important step forward." The association recommended in June that medical schools pool contributions from companies as a means of shielding teachers from commercial influences.

Ken Johnson, a spokesman for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, said Monday that "America's pharmaceutical research companies have taken positive steps to help ensure they provide nothing but accurate and balanced information to health care providers."

Dr. Philip A. Pizzo, dean of Stanford's School of Medicine, said in an interview that the school wanted to take a firm stand on the issue, even if it meant that drug and device companies might no longer contribute to the educational effort if they could not specify which classes they wanted to support.

"I want to make sure we're not marketing for industry or being influenced by their marketing," Dr. Pizzo said.

The policy comes in the wake of growing scrutiny of industry financing of doctor education. In April 2007, Senator [Charles E. Grassley](#), Republican of Iowa, issued a report that documented how drug makers used the classes to increase sales of their latest products.

In an e-mail statement on Monday, Senator Grassley said, "Reforms based on transparency can foster accountability and build confidence in medical education and, in turn, the practice of medicine."

Since Senator Grassley began his investigation, a growing number of drug makers have begun to make public their lists of educational grant recipients, and [Pfizer](#) recently announced that it would no longer directly support commercial medical education companies, which deliver many of the classes that doctors attend and may be more susceptible to industry influence than ones based at medical schools.

Doctors have grown accustomed to taking educational classes free — often with a lunch included. Separating commercial influences from doctor education might require doctors to pay their own way, which some doctors have said they would resist.

Dr. Murray Kopelow, chief executive of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, said that Stanford's new policy was part of a growing push in medical education to further separate crucial medical information from marketing messages.

"It's a good plan, and it's a big deal that a place like Stanford has adopted it," Dr. Kopelow said. "When this is all over, medical education will not be the same as what it's been."