

# Stanford Medical School restricting industry funding of continuing education for physicians

## COMPANIES NOW CAN'T TARGET DONATIONS

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To keep its doctors from being tainted by business biases, Stanford University's medical school announced Tuesday that it is imposing a highly unusual restriction on educational contributions by drug and medical device companies.

Under the policy, which takes effect Monday, companies will no longer be able to designate that their contributions be used for specific types of medical training, to limit the companies' ability to tailor those sessions around their products.

Instead, the companies will only be able to make general-purpose contributions and the kind of training it finances will be determined solely by Stanford.

The change was hailed by Robert Restuccia, executive director of the Prescription Project, a Boston-based organization that seeks to limit industry conflicts of interest at medical schools.

"It's an important step forward," he said. "It puts Stanford in the elite of schools" attempting to restrain corporate influence on their campuses.

Dr. David Korn, chief scientific officer for the Association of American Medical Colleges and a former Stanford Medical School dean, agreed.

"They are really taking a very important leadership role and setting a very high example for others to follow," he said.

At least five other medical schools — the University of California-Davis and the universities of Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Colorado and Kansas — have procedures limiting the say companies have in how their education contributions are spent, according to the Prescription Project. But Stanford's policy appears to be among the most restrictive.

Officials at Stanford, whose faculty ties to medical companies were the subject of several Mercury News stories in 2006, said they have been looking into their interactions with industry since 2005.

The university enacted a policy in 2006 that barred its doctors from receiving free medical company meals and other gifts. But Dr. Philip Pizzo, Stanford's medical school dean, said it became clear that wasn't enough after his discussions with industry leaders convinced him companies "could modify the prescribing patterns of physicians" through their educational programs.

The new restrictions on companies could backfire, Pizzo acknowledged.

"The big risk for us, of course, is that they may say, 'Gee, we're just not going to give any money to Stanford,'" he said. Nonetheless, he added, "We want to be sure we're not contributing to the marketing of products."

Drug and medical-device company contributions for continuing medical education have surged nationwide from \$302 million in 1998 to \$1.2 billion in 2006, according to the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. Stanford officials said about \$1.87 million — or 38 percent — of the medical school's budget for continuing education came from industry sources in fiscal 2006-07.

The trend prompted the American Medical Association's Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs in June to issue a report urging individual doctors and medical institutions to reject such donations because it could "threaten the integrity of medicine's educational function," according to a Stanford news release.

Congress also has been investigating industry financing of continuing medical education.

Because of such concerns, "companies have taken steps to separate the grant-making process for educational programs from their marketing efforts," according to a statement issued by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which represents many large drug and biotechnology companies.

Still, Stanford's new policy "will help ensure that patients can have faith that their doctors' decisions are based on science and not a drug company's marketing plan," said John Simpson of Consumer Watchdog, an advocacy group based in Santa Monica.