

August 26, 2008

## Stanford to Restrict Industry Sponsorship of Continuing Medical Education

In an effort to avoid conflicts of interest, Stanford University will severely restrict industry support for continuing medical education, the medical school's dean, Phillip A. Pizzo, announced today on its [Web site](#).

For years, drug and medical-device companies have paid for refresher courses that doctors must take to maintain their licenses. The companies say they just want to keep doctors current on the latest medical information, but critics charge that the sponsors use the courses to promote their products.

Under Stanford's new policy, which will take effect on Monday, the medical school will pool contributions from drug companies rather than allow a company to specify which specific courses it wants to underwrite. "I want to be able to honor the public trust," Dr. Pizzo said. "We want CME to be unbiased and science-driven, and we don't want it to be influenced by marketing."

Five other major medical schools have adopted the pooled approach, [The New York Times](#) reported today, citing information from a watchdog group called the Prescription Project. The others are the medical schools at the Universities of Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, and California at Davis. The move comes two years after Stanford [banned industry gifts](#), including free meals, at its medical center.

The issue of conflict of interest in medical education has sparked heated debate in recent years. Last month, U.S. Sen. Charles E. Grassley of Iowa [told The Chronicle](#) that the National Institutes of Health should revoke grants to university scientists who failed to report conflicts of interest. And last year, the Republican senator issued [a report](#) describing how he says pharmaceutical companies use continuing medical education to bolster sales of their products. —*Katherine Mangan*