

UT Southwestern gets a B in study of drug industry conflicts of interest 11:57 AM CT

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The good news: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas received the state's best score in a national study measuring the conflict of interest between medical schools and the pharmaceutical industry.

The bad news: The school got a B and led state scores, which included three F's and four I's, for schools who submitted incomplete data. Two of the schools receiving F's did not respond to the survey.

[Link: Find more details and check medical school scores](#)

The pharmaceutical industry spends nearly \$30 billion each year attempting to influence physician prescribing through tactics ranging from free lunches to financial support for educational events, according to the American Medical Student Association, which conducted the study, and The Prescription Project, the Boston-based non profit group that paid for it.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a Washington D.C. group representing the interest of drug companies, did not respond by publication time.

The failed drug Vioxx, a painkiller used in the treatment of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, is an example of an expensive, heavily marketed drug that became a substitute for objective medical evidence, said Allan Coukell, director of policy at The Prescription Project. The drug was pulled in 2004 after the Food and Drug Administration said it was linked to thousands of deaths.

Dr. Brian Hurley, the AMSA's national president, said there is substantial evidence that marketing shapes physicians prescribing habits.

"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," he said.

Only seven U.S. medical schools received A's on the scorecard, which assessed all 150 U.S. Medical Schools on their conflict of interest policies related to industry marketing.

"It's hard to get a B," Mr. Coukell said of UT Southwestern's score. "It shows they've gone a long way in addressing this."

The study was conducted between November 2007 and May. Schools who did not respond were given an F. All schools not responding were contacted at least four times over the six-month period, according to Mr. Coukell.