Abstract

• Relationships with drug companies influence the practices of medical students and healthcare professionals.

• To ensure that medical education remains patient-focused, the American Medical Student Association (AMSA) is calling for medical schools to establish stringent rules governing their relationships with industry.

• Since 2007, AMSA has been rating medical schools according to the rules they have established to minimize conflicts of interest.

• The score is based on a list of 14 criteria designed to prevent conflicts of interest, and it is used each year to rate American medical schools.

• The 14 criteria include gifts and meals, for example, but also pharmaceutical sales representative access to campus, industry funding of talks and presentations, and education on conflicts of interest.

• The 2014 AMSA scorecard showed that more than two-thirds of US medical schools had established excellent or robust rules governing students’ relationships with industry. Their number is growing from year to year, as reflected by the steady increase in the number of schools that ban pharmaceutical reps from visiting students.

• In 2014, AMSA also began to score teaching hospitals, and found that two-thirds of them had implemented robust rules for avoiding conflicts of interest among their students.

• The AMSA scorecard is backed up by actions intended to promote student awareness of conflicts of interest, including an AMSA guide laying out the desired content of the conflict-of-interest curriculum.

Criteria used by the American Medical Student Association to rate medical schools and teaching hospitals in 2014

AMSA uses various criteria to judge exposure to industry influence. In 2014, the criteria were scored from 1 to 3. A score of 3 corresponds to a “model policy” based on rules that are effective for avoiding or limiting industry influence. A score of 2 (“good progress toward model policy”) corresponds to more limited rules with inadequate enforcement. A score of 1 indicates the total absence of rules.

Criteria applying to medical schools

• Gifts and meals

  Score 3 (model policy). No industry-funded gifts or meals, regardless of nature or value.

  Score 2 (good progress toward model policy). Industry funding allowed for:
  – Gifts or meals worth no more than $10;
  – gifts limited to educational items (textbooks);
  – meals provided at industry-funded accredited continuing medical education events, or when provided on-site as part of an indirect grant from industry.

• Industry-funded promotional speaking relationships

  Score 3. No industry payment for promotional presentations or talks. Remuneration for talks is only permitted if they are not promotional in nature, but purely educational; and if industry has no role in determining or approving presentation content.

  Score 2. Industry-funded speaking relationships are regulated but with less stringent content control and compensation rules, etc.

• Attendance of industry-funded promotional events

  Score 3. Faculty, students and trainees are prohibited or discouraged from...
attending industry-sponsored promotional events. Attendees cannot accept
industry reimbursement for travel or other remuneration.

Score 2. Attendance allowed, but attendees cannot accept industry reim-
bursement for travel or other remuneration.

- **Participation in industry-funded medical conferences or training ses-
sions**

  Score 3. Industry support for resi-
dents and medical students to attend
conferences or training is prohibited.

  Score 2. Industry support to attend
conferences or training is allowed, but
there are one or more safeguards in
place to ensure the funds are not used
by the company to establish a market-
ing relationship with the trainee.

- **Accredited continuing medical educa-
tion**

  Score 3. Industry funding is not ac-
cepted for the support of accredited
continuing medical education courses,
except in certain circumstances that
the faculty explains to AMSA; for
example, a course that would other-
wise be prohibitively expensive for
the physician concerned.

  Score 2. Commercial support accept-
ed, but at least one measure is in place
to prevent promotional content; for
example, requiring more than one
sponsor for any event; not allowing
departments to make a profit from
industry funding; requiring partici-
pants to cover some of the cost of the
programme, such as meals.

- **Ghostwriting and honorary author-
ship**

  Score 3. Industry-funded ghost-
writing and honorary authorship are
strictly prohibited.

  Score 2. The practice is discouraged,
but not prohibited.

- **Consulting and advising relations-
ships**

  Score 3. Consulting or advising re-
lationships for purely commercial or
marketing purposes are prohibited or
actively discouraged. Research and sci-
entific activities are not prohibited but
are strictly regulated.

  Score 2. All consulting and advising
relationships (research, scientific activ-
ties and commercial relationships) are
allowed but regulated.

   - **Access for pharmaceutical sales
representatives**

    Score 3. Pharmaceutical sales repre-
sentatives are not allowed access to
any faculty or trainees in medical
schools. However, faculty may invite
other industry scientists who are not
acting as sales representatives for spe-
cific discussions that do not involve
marketing a specific product.

    Score 2. Pharmaceutical representa-
tives are allowed to meet with faculty,
provided the meetings take place only
in non-patient care areas and by
appointment only.

   - **Access for medical device repre-
sentatives**

    Score 3. Medical device representa-
tives are permitted in patient care
areas only for legitimate reasons not
related to marketing, such as providing
necessary technical assistance and/or
training on devices and other equip-
ment already purchased.

    Score 2. Medical device representa-
tives are permitted in patient care
areas, but site access is regulated in
some way (such as requiring an
appointment).

   - **Conflict of interest disclosure**

    Score 3. Speakers must disclose their
conflicts of interest to the host institu-
tion, as well as to trainees and any
other audiences.

    Score 2. At least one of the above
types of disclosure is required.

   - **Conflict-of-interest curriculum for
medical students**

    Score 3. Conflict-of-interest educa-
tion is required for medical students.
The materials must reflect and cover
most of the curricular content and
objectives set out in the AMSA stan-
dards for a “model curriculum.”

    Score 2. Conflict-of-interest educa-
tion is required for medical students,
but it is more limited and does not
meet the AMSA standard.

   - **Extension of conflict-of-interest
policies to all school affiliates**

    Score 3. The policy must apply to
both of the following:
   - All employees (full/part-time or vol-
unteer faculty) and students/trainees
   - Wherever faculty and trainees are
working, even if the affiliated institu-
tion does not have the same policy.

    Score 2. At least one of the above
demands is met.

   - **Enforcement and sanctions of
policies**

    Score 3. General oversight to ensure
compliance with conflict-of-interest pol-
cies and sanctions for non-compliance.

    Score 2. Oversight or sanctions, but
not both.

**Criteria specific to teaching
hospitals**

The scoring system for teaching hos-
pitals includes three specific criteria, in
addition to the 11 criteria shared with
medical schools; gifts, meals, speaking,
endorsing continuing medical educa-
tion, ghostwriting, consulting or advis-
ing relationships with industry,
conflict-of-interest disclosures, and
education on conflicts of interest,
monitoring, and sanctions.

- **Industry-funded travel**

  Score 3. No industry-funded student
travel allowed, except travel necessary
for training in the use of a medical
device already purchased by the hos-
pital, etc.

  Score 2. Travel funding allowed, but
with measures to ensure it is not used
to establish commercial links with stu-
dents.

- **Free samples**

  Score 3. Sample distribution prohib-
ited, with very few exceptions.

  Score 2. Sample distribution allowed
in limited, specific conditions and in
patients’ interests, with hospital
approval, while ensuring they are not
used for commercial purposes.

- **Teams involved in purchases of
medicines and medical devices**

  Score 3. If relationships with industry
exist, then teaching staff or team
members involved in purchases must
not be allowed to influence purchasing
decisions concerning medicines or
medical devices from the same com-
pany.

  Score 2. Rules are less strict, requiring
disclosure of conflicts of interest, for
example, but allowing participation in
purchasing decisions.

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