The French Sunshine Act
False transparency

France was promised that the Mediator disaster would represent a watershed. In particular, the relationships that experts and healthcare professionals have with industries in the healthcare sector would be exposed, in order to reduce the conflicts of interest which harm patients and inflate the cost of health care. But ultimately, most of the links that generate conflicts of interest remain hidden.

Backtracking on transparency. France’s “drug safety” act, passed in December 2011, does not go far enough when it comes to certain issues. It nevertheless stipulates that the links between companies and other organisations that were involved in health care must be disclosed, by making public the existence of any contracts with and benefits in cash or in kind provided to healthcare professionals, patients, students, the media, and scientific societies, etc. (1).

As of August 2012, after a change of government, it was clear that the decree implementing the act would not be adequate to the task (2). For example, the draft decree allowed healthcare professionals to receive €998 per year from each company without disclosure, provided that no single gift or payment was worth more than €59: the price of a meal in a good restaurant.

The draft decree adopted strong criticism, and the version that was finally adopted requires disclosure of all gifts over €10 (3). Why €10, when even small gifts have been shown to influence the recipient, by eliciting goodwill and a need to reciprocate?

But worse yet: “Remuneration, salaries and fees paid for work or services provided are not considered as benefits” (our translation) (4). How easy it will be for healthcare professionals and others who work for or provide services for industries in the healthcare sector, it means, yet again, putting commercial interests before health. It also means continuing to accept industry’s powerful influence on decisions in the field of health care.

Translated from *Rev Prescrire* July 2013; 33 (357): 534

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**Selected references from Prescrire’s literature search.**


