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**HEALTH CARE REFORM**

**Are We Providers or Physicians?**

I read with interest the comments made in a recent issue concerning pharmaceutical sales.1 Undue pressure masked as marketing is inappropriate, but physicians must make decisions concerning new agents based on information given to them by pharmaceutical companies, since the initial studies of new agents are sponsored and paid for by the pharmaceutical companies. When pharmaceutical representatives come into my office with their information, studies, and samples, I am aware that they are sponsored by their company. This is akin to watching a commercial for the product.

In my outpatient practice, the lunches I ate, and will continue to eat as long as it is legal, help me and my office staff with our expenses as well as help us to learn valuable information concerning new products. The samples I receive are invaluable to my patients.

One of my close personal friends runs a business where he sells lunches to the drug companies for their distribution. In my discussions with him, if additional cuts are made in this area, many small catering businesses will go out of business. The money spent by the drug companies does not evaporate but circulates through our economy.

However, direct-to-consumer marketing of prescription drugs is inappropriate, and often advertisements are downright silly and even condescending. These ads market drugs to persons who cannot write prescriptions. They must be effective, because each year more millions are spent on these ads while pressure is being placed on these companies to eliminate marketing to physicians, who make clinical decisions and actually write prescriptions. It is also interesting to me that the national media has been relatively silent about these print and media ads. Prime-time television is filled with pharmaceutical ads for prescription medications. Could this be influencing the lack of outcry spent on this aspect of the pharmaceutical business?

The pharmaceutical companies are not the enemy. Without free-market forces operating within this industry, new drug development will be diminished, resulting in the decrement in the quality and quantity of medicines and therapies. Americans have come to expect the constant development of new therapies. If the government tries to externally micromanage the pharmaceutical industry drug development will be greatly limited. The health of all of us is at stake.

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