

Bill introduced to shed light on relationship between drug companies, doctors

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON, DC - Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ways and Means Health Subcommittee Chairman Pete Stark (D- CA) joined together Thursday to introduce The Physician Payment Sunshine Act. This legislation builds on existing laws in Minnesota, Vermont, Maine and West Virginia to require prescription drug and medical device manufacturers to publicly report any gifts with a value of \$25 dollars or more provided to doctors in connection with their marketing activities. Under the new legislation, this information would be made widely available to the public. This bill will provide much needed transparency into the increasingly corrosive relationship between the pharmaceutical and medical device industries and American physicians.

This legislation is the companion bill to S.2029, introduced by Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Herb Kohl (D-WI).

"Americans are being gouged by pharmaceutical companies that spend more on marketing than they do on research and development," DeFazio said. "They enjoy generous subsidies from the government, but have no accountability when it comes to the billions of dollars they spend promoting high priced drugs. I am proud to introduce this legislation which would shine a light on the marketing practices of drug companies and give patients the information they need to make an informed decision about their healthcare."

"Patients deserve to know if doctors are on the take," said Stark. "Gifts and payments change doctors' behavior. If they didn't, drug, device, and medical supply companies wouldn't bother. The Sunshine Act will help enable Medicare beneficiaries to determine if their doctors are acting in patients' best interests. It may even convince doctors to quit taking what can only be described as industry kickbacks."

Pharmaceutical Companies spend over \$19 billion dollars a year in direct marketing to Physicians. This marketing comes in the form of lavish trips, meals, speaking fees and honoraria. Over 94% of physicians admit to receiving these gifts every year, with many receiving payments in excess of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. A report in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that these gifts influence the clinical decisions of doctors. Recently, two of the largest drug companies in America were found to have been paying doctors hundreds of millions of dollars to prescribe their anemia medications that were recently found to be unsafe at commonly used doses.

"If the billions of dollars drug companies spend taking doctors on trips to the Caribbean and to expensive dinners at the country's finest restaurants are above-board, then the pharmaceutical industry should support our legislation," DeFazio said. "This bill will keep the pharmaceutical industry honest."

The legislation is supported by the following groups:

The Prescription Project / Community Catalyst

Consumers Union

Committee of Interns and Residents

American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

Medicare Rights Center

HealthPartners Health Plan, MN

Health Partners Medical Group, MN

MN Senior Federation

National Physicians Alliance

National Women's Health Network

USAction

No Free Lunch

Gray Panthers

Mississippi Human Services Coalition

Mon Valley Unemployed Committee

Pharmacist Planning Services

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