



What does your doctor sell out for?

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Posted on March 1, 2007, Printed on March 2, 2007

<http://www.alternet.org/bloggers/heather/48663/>

How much influence could a free pen have over what medication your doctor prescribes for you? What about a cup of coffee? A couple of baseball tickets? A couple of baseball tickets from a 20-something woman wearing a short skirt and Rembrandt smile?

Think about it because the drug industry is. And they're convinced these gifts work otherwise they probably wouldn't have approximately four drug sales representatives for every doctor. Or spend twice as much on marketing as they do on research and development. Or have two drug lobbyists for every legislator in Washington.

None of this would be a problem if the drugs worked well, were safe and didn't cost much. But a new documentary from Kathleen Slattery-Moschkau called *Money Talks: Profits Before Patient Safety* shows that's far from the case.

After all, there's no need to heavily market a cheap drug with known benefits (e.g. Aspirin), and, I'm guessing a cure for cancer would sell itself.

Money Talks exposes shady drug industry practices with 50 minutes of footage from interviews with doctors, professors, pharma sales reps and an investigative journalist. It's not the most visually exciting film (i.e. there's no B-roll), but it is important for anyone who wants to understand how corporations are controlling their health.

Big Pharma's rise to power is relatively new. In the early 80s, almost no clinical studies were commercially funded; today, about 90 percent are. Two decades ago, most people did not know the names of prescription drugs; today, patients ask for Prilosec, Zelnorm, and Zoloft by name.

But drug company influence is only in part about money and advertising. It's also, to a large degree, about building relationships -- a process that starts before doctors ever become doctors. That's why pharmaceutical companies begin sending gifts to students while they're still in medical school. Once that person is already in the habit of accepting seemingly harmless freebies, it gets easier to accept more gifts in the future.

Doctors will admit that they think ties to drug companies are hurting the profession, but, in unguarded moments, they will also say that visits from young, attractive, well-spoken sales reps can be a nice departure from the nasty rashes, phlegm and puking they see the rest of the day.

Part of that rep's job is to create positive associations with certain drugs and to make new drugs familiar. The industry knows that part of an ultra-busy doctor's decision to

prescribe one drug over another is simply about being able to remember its name, dosages and how to use it. Never mind that many of the drug reps who are handing out free samples and teaching doctors how to use them are educated with degrees in marketing or finance, not medicine.

These are just a few examples of how Big Pharma uses its power to cheat consumers. Unless more people become educated about these abuses, the government won't become interested in reform because they, too, are beholden to drug companies.

To learn more about disturbing trends in the drug industry or to host a screening of *Money Talks*, visit <http://moneytalks.bravenewtheaters.com>.

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