

Summary: Conflicts of Interest

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- Drug companies are highly skilful at spending money to ensure they sell more of their products. Although this is not necessarily wrong, it can harm patients and cause conflicts of interest in the health professionals who are taking part.
- There are five common ways in which drug companies achieve this.
 1. *Promotional speaking* – drug companies engage prominent speakers to talk to other doctors, and the company's product will be prominent at the venue.
 2. *Continuing medical education (CME)* – often arranged through a third party, which gives education courses for doctors in which the company's product is mentioned favourably. Not all CME is corrupt but pharmaceutical firms have taken charge of courses to promote their drugs.
 3. *Medical societies and organisations* – Non-profit making organisations who get significant funding from drug companies, and are very supportive of the drug company in their messages as a result.
 4. *Clinical treatment guidelines* – these are essentially standards of care, and the authors have links to drug companies making drugs that are used (or misused) in the treatment. The links are not always disclosed or are not disclosed prominently.
 5. *Medical device royalties* – the 'mother lode' of conflict of interest money. Authors of research papers receive royalties from a medical device, while writing favourable research reports on its use, possibly with the manufacturer's collusion or even control.
- Health journalists should always aim to look for and highlight conflicts of interest even if they have relatively little time to write the story.