

REPORT REVIEW -

The Relationship between Physicians and the Pharmaceutical Industry

A Report of the Royal College of Physicians, London – Royal College of Physicians of London, London NW1 4LE, 1990.

The conduct of members of the medical profession and the multifarious interactions between them and the pharmaceutical industry have been subjects of discussions of active Consumer Associations, press reports, television programmes and comments in medical journals in the West. This increased awareness and expression of concern in various forums of the relationship between the medical profession which prescribes medicinal products for patients and the pharmaceutical industry which manufactures and markets them led to the establishment of a Working Party of the Royal College of Physicians of London chaired by the President and comprising distinguished Fellows of the College, members of the pharmaceutical industry and the public, to enquire primarily into the behaviour of physicians vis-a-vis the pharmaceutical industry. The Working Party heard evidence from many sources and met a dozen times before compiling its report. The subjects covered included sponsored meetings, hospitality, gifts and inducements, visits abroad, contracts and payments for clinical research and studies, publication of results of clinical trials and patterns of prescribing habits.

The Report published in 1986 and again in 1990 touched on all of the above subjects and emphasized two overriding principles:

- The behaviour of members of the medical profession in relation to the pharmaceutical industry should always be, and perceived to be, scrupulously impartial and honest; and
- Any benefit in cash or kind, any gift, any hospitality or any subsidy/grant received from a pharmaceutical company must leave the doctor's independence of judgement manifestly unimpaired, a useful criterion to determine what is acceptable being: 'Would the doctor be willing to have these arrangements generally known?'

This Report is concise and precise. It is written in easily understandable English and is well produced. It should be made available to all members of the medical profession, possibly through organisations like the Indian Medical Association and the Indian Medical Council. It serves as a guide to what is permissible and what is not. It is urgently needed in India where many doctors receive hospitality, gifts and inducements from the pharmaceutical industry on a scale beyond the realms of professional ethics. Another sphere of activity of doctors in India which needs scrutiny is that of clinical trials which, for the most part, are not performed to a reliable and acceptable standard of quality.

G. N. Menon

"Science and technology ... are a shared heritage of all mankind. East and West, South and North have all equally participated in their creation in the past as, we hope, they will in the future – the joint endeavour in Science becoming one of the unifying forces among the diverse peoples on this globe".

Abdus Salam. *Health Research: Essential Link to Equity in Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; p.13.