



American Medical Student Association/Foundation

- Universal Health Care
- Eliminating Health Disparities
- Diversity in Medicine
- Transforming Medical Education

February 1, 2006

The Honorable Pete Stark
The United States House of Representatives
239 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Stark,

On behalf of the 60,000 physician-in-training members of the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), we would like to offer our strong support for the Prescription Drug Safety and Affordability Act. The impact of pharmaceutical marketing on the professional behavior of physicians is very concerning to the future physicians of America. AMSA has long advocated for physicians to protect their independence from the pharmaceutical industry.

We applaud the Prescription Drug Safety and Affordability Act as a way to reduce the financial incentives for promoting drugs. The pharmaceutical companies spent \$7.3 billion on detailing to doctors in 2004, more than twice what was spent in 1997.¹ These gifts to physicians contribute to the high cost of medications for our patients. Taxpayers should not further subsidize this behavior through the deductibility of drug company promotions to physicians.

Gifts from the pharmaceutical industry have an eroding effect on the doctor-patient relationship. Numerous studies have documented how those gifts influence the prescribing behavior of physicians, often in ways that deviate from the recommended treatment guidelines. However, the most obvious evidence that gifts influence physicians is the fact that drug companies would not spend billions of dollars on pens, meals and honorarium if it didn't work.

Since 2002 AMSA has been entirely independent of funding from drug companies in our meetings and publications, and we have called for other physician groups to follow our lead. Last month the Journal of the American Medical Association published recommendations from leading academicians that academic medical centers – where physicians are trained – should be entirely free of pharmaceutical representatives, industry sponsored meals and free samples. We applaud the institutions of medical education for taking this step.

AMSA's PharmFree Campaign (www.amsa.org/prof/pharmfree.cfm) has been cited in major medical journals, making AMSA a leader in removing the pharmaceutical companies' influence in the practice of medicine. In 2005, AMSA launched the Counterdetailing Campaign where medical students teach physicians to use non-biased sources of information about prescription drugs. *Time* magazine and *USA Today* have featured AMSA and our Counterdetailing Campaign. Through AMSA, medical students continue to lead the drive to protect the doctor-patient relationship from outside influences.

The Prescription Drug Safety and Affordability Act will remove the unhealthy influence of the drug industry from the practice of medicine. AMSA is proud to support your efforts and leadership in this issue. If we can help in any way, please contact Chris McCoy, Legislative Affairs Director at 703 620 6600 x 211.

Sincerely,

Leana S. Wen
National President

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Legislative Affairs Director

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¹ http://www.imshealth.com/ims/portal/front/articleC/0,2777,6599_49695992_75406357,00.html