

Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL)
Aging Committee Opening Statement
Physician Payment Sunshine Act – Continuing Medical Education
Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Thank you Mr. Chairman for calling today's hearing.

The subject of transparency in the medical profession is timely given the current debate over the high costs associated with health care.

In pursuit of their profession, doctors invest an inordinate amount of time and work, often accumulating tremendous debt even before they begin practicing medicine.

To stay current in the medical field and to maintain a medical license, doctors devote substantial time to develop their medical knowledge and skills through continuing medical education.

For these reasons, doctors are rightfully held in high esteem by the general public and their patients.

This is why accounts of ethical and legal lapses by some doctors and pharmaceutical companies are especially troubling. These ethical lapses raise questions about patient well-being and stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

One arrangement we'll hear about today involves off-label promotion of a prescription drug that purports to be independent continuing medical education.

Today, doctors and patients enjoy access to an abundance of information from numerous sources. Patients rely on doctors to sift through this information and use it to make sound judgments about the benefits and risks of certain medical procedures, drugs, and devices.

While off-label prescribing by doctors is legal and in many instances appropriate, promoting a drug for off-label purposes by the drug-maker is not.

Continuing medical education is essential for disseminating information that helps doctors make decisions about appropriate off-label use of a drug.

Sometimes the line between promotion and education can be blurred. This is why transparency and appropriate, commonsense safeguards, are necessary.

While industry support of continuing medical education is an important source of funding for medical education, transparency and appropriate safeguards are crucial to maintain the integrity of medical decision-making.

Disclosing payments to doctors, be they from Medicaid or from pharmaceutical companies, allows the public to reach their own conclusions about the appropriateness of such payment arrangements.

Transparency is the bedrock of legislation I introduced earlier this year, the Medicaid Accountability through Transparency, or MAT Act. It's consistent with Chairman Kohl's and Mr. Grassley's bill, the Physician Payments Sunshine Act.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about this important matter and I thank the Chair for holding this hearing today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.