One-Fifth of Presenters Mum on Disclosures

BY JOYCE FRIEDEN

Despite explicit requirements, a number of speakers at medical meetings do not disclose financial conflicts of interest, a study has found.

"Currently, disclosures by physicians are largely self-reported, but there is reason to suspect that this may change in the near future," Dr. Kanu Okike of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, and colleagues wrote. "Legislation requiring all drug and device manufacturers to publicly disclose payments to physicians is currently pending in the U.S. Congress and has been met with widespread support."

The authors analyzed payments made to physicians in 2007 by five makers of total hip and knee prostheses that together account for nearly 95% of the market (N. Engl. J. Med. 2009;361:1466-74). They compared the payments with conflict of interest disclosures made by physicians who either presented at or served as board or committee members at the 2008 annual meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS).

A total of 1,347 payments were made to 1,162 physicians during 2007. Overall, 166 physicians received payments from multiple companies, and 282 payments exceeded $100,000. One-fourth of the payments (344) were made to presenters or board/committee members at the AAOS meeting.

In 70% of the 299 cases that could be evaluated for topic relatedness, the payment was directly related to the topic of the presentation at the meeting.

The overall disclosure rate for the payments was 71%, including 79% for directly related payments, 50% for indirectly related payments, and 49% for unrelated payments. Of 91 surveyed physicians who did not disclose payments, 36 cited unrelated topics among their reasons.

The authors cited the high rate of nondisclosure as the most notable finding of their study, saying that the disclosures didn't occur "despite instructions directing each participant to make a disclosure 'if he or she has received something of value from a commercial company or institution, which relates directly or indirectly to the subject of their presentation.' "They also noted that the 43 nondisclosed payments relating directly to the presentations totaled $4.3 million.

Limitations of the study included assessing payment relatedness by comparing the presentation topic with the specialty of the companies in question, which "could have underestimated the number of unrelated payments and, consequently, the overall rate of disclosure," they wrote.

As for their own disclosures, the authors noted that coauthors Dr. Mininder Kocher, Dr. Charles Mehlman, and Dr. Mohit Bhandari have received grants from or consulted for a number of medical device firms, including several of those mentioned in the study. ■

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