

Medicines breakthrough: Pharma payments to doctors disclosed

The identification of thousands of doctors receiving payments from pharmaceutical companies is a landmark advance towards transparency in health care, the Consumers Health Forum says.

“The voluntary disclosure of the names of doctors and others who have received significant payments for talking about pharmaceuticals opens up these once-hidden transactions to public scrutiny and that is an important development for health consumers” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“While there was resistance in some quarters of the medical profession to the move to individual disclosure, we congratulate the many doctors who have voluntarily declared the payments.

“This is a further vital step in the lifting of the shroud which often obscures the inner workings and payments of the health system.

“It is very much in the consumer’s interests that payments from drug companies and any other firms to health practitioners are on the public record.

“Evidence-based medicine is a central feature of our health care. It makes sense that any payments concerning education and promotion about drugs are out in the open because we don’t want consumers to be

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prescribed medicines on grounds other than what is in the best interests of their health.

“This opening up is the result of gradual moves by the ACCC and the industry body, Medicines Australia, to progressively strengthen its code of conduct to meet stronger standards of transparency.

“This will take a further step forward when the disclosure of payments will become mandatory for the next report.

“There remains however a significant area where perks to doctors remain undisclosed. Doctors can still receive meals valued at up to \$120 paid for by drug companies without disclosure.

“That leaves considerable scope for benefits to doctors by pharmaceutical reps making their routine visits to practices.

“While many doctors have argued they are not swayed by drug company perks, research shows otherwise.

“A new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* for instance found that doctors who receive a single inexpensive meal from a drug company tend to prescribe a lot more of that company’s products.

“The Consumers Health Forum believes it would be in the interests of healthy medicines policy for annual limits to be placed on the value of meals for doctors,” Ms Wells said.

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