

There is a growing need for physicians to limit their marketing relationships with pharmaceutical companies. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 94% of physicians accept gifts or payments from industry. Numerous studies have demonstrated that such gifts and payments directly influence medical decision-making. It has become difficult for physicians to find and distinguish legitimate, evidence-based sources of medical information from biased, promotional sources that have been funded by drug companies. The very distinction between marketing and education has been blurred.

This is the story of a medical group in Madras, Oregon, that decided to free their practice and educational environment from undue marketing pressures.



The Unbranded Doctor Campaign of the National Physicians Alliance represents a network of physicians across America who believe that medical offices should not accept or display free promotional products from industry salespeople. Even small gifts have been shown to influence medical decision-making and undermine best practice.

To join our campaign, visit www.npalliance.org.

To learn more:

National Physicians Alliance www.npalliance.org

The Prescription Project www.prescriptionproject.org

American Medical Student Association www.amsa.org

THE UNBRANDED DOCTOR

Evolution of an Unbranded Office: The Story of the Madras Medical Group



Madras Medical Group

A small high desert town with a population of 5,000, Madras, Oregon, supports only one general medical practice, the Madras Medical Group. On January 1, 2006, practitioners there entered uncharted territory. They decided to become “unbranded.”

After concerns were raised about the growing number of visits from pharmaceutical sales representatives, mounting evidence that such visits influence medical decision-making, and—most alarming—several drug scandals that had put patients’ lives at risk, the doctors at Madras Medical Group decided that enough was enough. Talking with the reps took up time and reduced productivity in the office. This left less time for the patients and longer hours for the doctors.



Pharmaceutical Industry Influence in Madras

- Drug rep presence increased as town to the south grew
- Increase in visits and in free lunches, samples, and gifts
- Increased concern among some providers

Obstacles to Becoming an Unbranded Office

- Not all doctors were on board for the change
- Staff enjoyed the trinkets and lunches
- Without free lunches, would social time for staff diminish?
- Concern for those patients who regularly use promotional drug samples
- Public perception: Would the public be in favor or oppose the changes?

The practice did not change overnight. Small steps were gradually put in place to transform the office culture. Limited lunches by reps were set for once per month.. Fellow practitioners who were reluctant to change were asked to read published academic literature describing the growing influence of the pharmaceutical industry on medical practice. On January 1, 2006, the office purged all pharmaceutical company logos and stopped allowing visits from sales reps.



With the advent of a pharm-free office, the Madras Medical Group had to readjust to work without the drug reps. Monthly lunches were set up for the office staff to allow socializing among co-workers. Any items with drug-company logos had to be replaced with unbranded items bought at local business.

The Results

- Patients very accepting of changes
- Sales reps continue to invite providers to meet outside the office
- Difficult to find certain items without company logos (e.g., pregnancy wheels)
- Monthly staff lunches a success
- Favorable press coverage

“This was an important change. Without the daily distraction of sales pitches, it is easier for all of us to concentrate on independent, evidence-based sources of medical information. We have refused to allow commonplace marketing strategies to interrupt our focus on what is truly best for our patients.”

— Dave Evans, MD