



Addressing Industry Conflicts-of-Interest at Academic Medical Institutions

Community Catalyst is a partner in a three-year initiative, the Partnership to Advance Conflict-Free Medical Education, designed to address the need for improvements in conflict-of-interest standards at the approximately 150 medical schools and 400 affiliated teaching hospitals in the United States. The three other partners in this initiative are the Pew Charitable Trusts, the American Medical Student Association (AMSA) and the National Physician Alliance (NPA). The initiative was funded by the Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Grant Program through a competitive grant process.ⁱ

Community Catalyst is a national non-profit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to quality affordable health care for all. Community Catalyst works in partnership with national, state and local organizations, policymakers, and foundations, providing leadership and support to improve the health of communities and to change the health care system so it serves everyone.ⁱⁱ With funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts, in 2006 Community Catalyst founded the Prescription Project,ⁱⁱⁱ to address conflicts-of-interest created by pharmaceutical industry marketing to physicians and to promote increased reliance by prescribers on independent evidence of drug effectiveness.

The Prescription Project, in collaboration with AMSA, NPA, medical leaders and other stakeholders, was critical in driving the adoption of strong new conflict-of-interest policies at medical schools and teaching hospitals across the country. In addition, it drove policy change at the state and national level, including new transparency requirements for industry-provider financial relationships, as well as programs to provide evidence-based education and outreach to prescribers.

Policy Implementation and Evaluation Instrument

A majority of medical schools and many teaching hospitals have now adopted policies addressing interactions with industry and conflicts-of-interest, but leadership at these institutions do not have a robust evaluation instrument to determine whether their policies are being followed. Community Catalyst will develop such an instrument with the guidance of a workgroup of expert compliance leaders from eight major institutions and methodology consultants. After piloting the instrument in a small number of institutions to test its effectiveness, Community Catalyst will publish the final instrument and encourage institutions to incorporate it into their own compliance and quality improvement processes.

Consultation to Academic Medical Institutions

Community Catalyst staff and a physician consultant can provide strategic assistance on best practices and policy implementation to medical schools and teaching hospitals seeking to improve conflict-of-interest policies or considering adoption of new policies. In some regions, we are convening “learning communities” of leaders from area institutions to share best practices, challenges and experiences in order to assist one another in the process of improvement. Community Catalyst is also working with the other organizations in the Partnership to engage medical school and teaching hospital leaders, physicians and medical students to support the effort to expand the number of institutions with strong and comprehensive conflict-of-interest policies.

To aid in the examination of best practice standards for medical schools and teaching hospitals, Community Catalyst participates in the projects’ Expert Task Force on Conflicts of Interest in Medicine, convened by Pew Charitable Trusts, which includes prestigious leaders from seven medical institutions. In addition, Community Catalyst utilizes the AMSA PharmFree Scorecard, a national advocacy tool that assesses written medical school policies. The AMSA Scorecard is undergoing review and revision as part of the overall project.

Tool Kit for Academic Medical Institutions

Community Catalyst will update its Tool Kit for Academic Medical Centers, originally developed in 2008 by the Prescription Project in collaboration with the Institute on Medicine as a Profession.^{iv} The Tool Kit includes background, policy considerations and exemplary policies on Gifts, Meals and Entertainment; Ghostwriting and Speakers Bureaus; Pharmaceutical Samples; Drug and Medical Device Procurement; Continuing Medical Education and Vendor Relations. Two new sections will be added as well. One will address best practices in medical school and teaching hospital conflict-of-interest curricula. The second new section will outline the Physician Payment Sunshine provisions of the Affordable Care Act and other new public sources of data on interactions with industry which can be used by institutions to audit internal disclosures.

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ⁱⁱ In addition to prescription drug reform, Community Catalyst projects and campaigns address Medicaid, SCHIP and health access expansion; delivery system improvement; racial and ethnic health disparities; public health; hospital accountability; and insurance reform.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2009 the Prescription Project became the Pew Prescription Project and is now based at Pew.

^{iv} See <http://www.prescriptionproject.org/initiatives?id=0004>