Which Companies are Taking Your Doctor to Dinner?

By Sabrina Perry on February 12, 2016 at 2:00 AM

If you knew your doctor was prescribing a drug made by a pharmaceutical company that frequently took her out to expensive dinners, could you trust this was an unbiased choice?

Much to the dismay of patients and doctors alike, study after study shows that marketing tactics such as dinners and pens actually work.

As a result, HealthGrove wanted to see which pharmaceutical and medical device companies spend the most money taking physicians “out to dinner.” Using 2014 data from the Open Payments program, we looked at the top 20 largest pharmaceutical and medical device companies to see which spent the most on “food and beverages” for doctors. The top 10 big-spending companies are listed at the end of this article.

Most pharmaceutical companies have large budgets set aside for marketing, which makes sense given the astronomical costs of developing new drugs. However, in a market that derives profit from sick people, serious ethical questions can crop up.

At its purest form, marketing lets people know that a product exists and what its uses are. However, it can also be used to trump competitors and dominate a marketplace — even if the advertised product is functionally inferior.
too much marketing that it overshadows alternative drugs?

Unfortunately, nowhere.

The reality that doctors are swayed by marketing tactics such as comped meals, whether consciously or not, is why the [Physician Payments Sunshine Act](https://www.physicianpaymenttransparency.org/) exists. Consumers can now see financial relationships between physicians and pharmaceutical and medical device companies and come to their own conclusions.

However, just because a company spends a lot on marketing doesn’t necessarily mean it is trying to get doctors to prescribe its drugs at the expense of alternatives. Because the cost of developing new drugs has reached record highs, a lot of money must go into marketing a drug in order for it to find success in a crowded marketplace.

Additionally, pharmaceutical companies spend more marketing to doctors than they do to patients because they know doctors are the prescription-pad-holding gatekeepers of their industry. Without a prescription, consumers (patients) can’t obtain the most expensive drugs — even if they want them. With this in mind, it’s no surprise pharmaceutical companies focus much of their marketing money on wining and dining physicians.

As the [MIT Technology Review](https://www.technologyreview.com/) pointed out, there will always be problems with a health care system in which the government is a huge player and where doctors, hospitals, insurers, drug companies and investors all expect to profit from treating people with illnesses or chronic conditions. But increased transparency about the process allows the public to identify outliers, suspicious financial behavior and, ultimately, make more informed health decisions.

### #10. Stryker Corporation

**Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverage:** 5.3%

**Total Payments Reported to Open Payments:** $62,224,900

**Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages:** $3,295,460

**Number of Doctors Paid:** 18,498

**Number of Food and Beverage Payments:** 63,860
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $34,801,589  
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $1,878,357  
Number of Doctors Paid: 14,794  
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 59,393  

#8. Genentech Inc.  
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 7%  
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $36,660,780  
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $2,565,520  
Number of Doctors Paid: 27,408  
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 98,992  

#7. St. Jude Medical Inc.  
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 8.9%  
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $44,980,940  
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $4,006,413  
Number of Doctors Paid: 20,034  
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 78,526  

#6. Sanofi and Genzyme US Companies  
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 11.7%  
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $33,781,784  
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $3,967,550  
Number of Doctors Paid: 63,913  
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 186,025  

#5. Allergan Inc.
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $5,817,434
Number of Doctors Paid: 46,071
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 207,977

#4. AbbVie Inc.
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 16.9%
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $35,531,353
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $5,987,729
Number of Doctors Paid: 63,038
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 260,177

#3. Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc.
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 19.5%
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $53,636,599
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $10,441,507
Number of Doctors Paid: 109,975
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 566,575

#2. Pfizer Inc.
Percent of Total Payments for Food and Beverages: 20.6%
Total Payments Reported to Open Payments: $38,987,504
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $8,023,804
Number of Doctors Paid: 110,051
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 535,585

#1. AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP
Total Amount Spent on Food and Beverages: $17,000,885
Number of Doctors Paid: 118,649
Number of Food and Beverage Payments: 912,962

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