

Two new studies warn -- medical doctors may be hazardous to your health

by S. L. Baker, features writer

(NaturalNews) Today's doctors-in-training are learning how to think critically and clearly about the need for -- and potential dangers of -- any drugs they prescribe. And surgeons only operate if they are physically and mentally able to make sure they will not be putting their patient in any danger, right? Unfortunately, two new papers show that those assumptions are wrong. In fact, they reveal critical reasons why mainstream medicine can be a danger to your health and even threaten your life.

Bottom line: med students are being taught through a ***hidden curriculum*** devised and carried out by Big Pharma (and allowed by medical schools) to push the prescribing of their drugs. Meanwhile, countless surgeons are operating and sometimes harming patients because they are impaired by fatigue and lack of sleep.

Here are the facts. Medical students in the United States are being bombarded with the pro-drug propaganda of pharmaceutical companies -- and the students are exposed to this throughout their education, even in the years before they have clinical experience treating patients. According to research led by Kirsten Austad and Aaron S. Kesselheim from Harvard Medical School just published in *PLoS Medicine*, it turns out the drug giants have created what the Harvard researchers have dubbed a highly influential *hidden curriculum*

that pushes doctors-in-training into accepting and promoting Big Pharma's prescription drugs and other therapies.

The enormous and ongoing contact with drug companies is associated with medical professionals developing positive attitudes about the marketing of prescription medications. Moreover, the med students are not developing any healthy skepticism about potential negative implications of the drug pushing techniques -- or the drugs themselves.

The Harvard research team studied all published studies on this topic and collected the results from a total of 9,850 medical students studying at 76 different medical schools. The results showed that most medical students were interacting with the pharmaceutical industry and that contact increased in the clinical years.

In fact, up to 90 percent of all students working with patients in clinics were receiving some form of educational materials from none other than Big Pharma. And most of the medical students thought it was fine and dandy to accept gifts from drug manufacturers. They justified taking these freebies by claiming they were *entitled to gifts from drug manufacturers* because they had financial hardships; some med students said it must be ethical because most other students accepted gifts, too.

Almost two-thirds of students claimed that despite the fact they were receiving promotions, gifts and having other interactions with Big Pharma sales representatives, they were somehow miraculously immune from any bias from all this attention and all the "extras" from drug companies. Student opinions were split on whether physician-industry interactions should be regulated either by medical schools or the government.

The authors of the new study recommend better education for medical students on the subject of physician and drug industry relationships and they are also pushing for medical institutions to support reforms such as rules limiting the contact students have with Big Pharma marketing. However, in a statement to the media, the researchers noted it could be difficult to change the influence of the drug giants who seem to have a stronghold on medical schools and students.

"Given the potential for educational and institutional messages to be counteracted by the hidden curriculum, changes should be directed at faculty and residents who serve as role models for medical students," the scientists concluded. "These changes can help move medical education a step closer to two important goals: the cultivation of strong professional values, as well as the promotion of a respect for scientific principles and critical review of evidence that will later inform clinical decision-making and prescribing practices."

Another article just published in *CMAJ* (Canadian Medical Association Journal) shows that doctors -- both residents still in training and experienced physicians -- may be putting patients at risk due to sleep deprivation.

"The problem may only be getting worse," *CMAJ* editors Drs. Noni MacDonald, Paul Hebert, Ken Flegel and Matthew Stanbrook wrote in an editorial. "Medical care today is more complex than in decades past....Increasing complexity of care at the bedside or in the operating theatre places unprecedented cognitive and physical demands on doctors who oversee and deliver care in these environments."

They noted that a recent study indicated that lack of sleep is causing higher rates of surgical complications, especially if a surgeon had less than six hours of sleep the preceding night.

For more information:

<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article...>

<http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/doi/10.1503/...>