

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

“Essays on Conflicts of Interest in Medicine”

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Conflicts of interest (COI) can often lead professionals to give biased advice. This dissertation focuses on COI in medicine. Despite expanding research on the prevalence and consequences of COI in medicine, little attention has been given to the psychological processes that enable physicians to rationalize the acceptance of gifts, and the circumstances under which individuals are likely to give more biased advice due to the presence of a COI.

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the acceptance of COI by physicians, and investigates how their perception of hardships may contribute to accepting gifts from pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers that appear, to many critics, to be unethical. The second chapter investigates whether people are willing to give more biased advice, due to a COI, to unidentified recipients rather than identified recipients, and similarly, to many anonymous people (as in defining a medical guideline) as compared with just one individual (as in a doctor-patient relationship). The final chapter examines the effect of disclosure, which is one of the most commonly proposed and implemented remedies for dealing with COI. Physicians who disclose their self-interests to patients may unwittingly pressure patients to comply with their recommendations. This is because patients may feel more uncomfortable to turn down the doctor’s recommendation following disclosure for fear of signaling distrust to their doctor, and patients may also feel increased pressure to satisfy the doctor’s self-interest. This pressure to comply may be decreased with external disclosure, given from a third party rather than from the advisor themselves.

Overall, these findings will help further our understanding of some of the factors that lead to greater acceptance of, and more biased advice due to, COI, as well as providing insights on the effects of disclosure policies to manage such conflicts.