

Doctors' ties to drug companies scrutinized

By Leana Wen, NPR

Last month, the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology issued new guidelines that could double the number of people taking cholesterol-lowering drugs.

The organizations receive financial support from drug companies, and many of the experts who worked on the guidelines have industry ties.

The groups' response to ethical concerns raised about the advice is, in large measure, that a final decision about what you should do to manage your health is between you and your doctor.

Unfortunately, doctors have biases, too. A 2007 study in The New England Journal of Medicine found that the vast majority of doctors have some kind of relationship with with a pharmaceutical or medical-device company. Most of the time, the ties involved free food or drug samples. Dozens of studies have demonstrated that even innocuous-seeming inducements like these can influence doctors' prescription practices.

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