

MCI prohibits doctors from taking gifts

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Doctors will now have to buy their own basmati rice, non-stick tawas, photo frames, dried fruits, dinner sets, travelling bags and so on. They will also have to pay for their own lunches and dinners, five-star or otherwise, and spend from their own pockets for holidays.

The Medical Council of India (MCI) has banned doctors from accepting gifts, travel facilities and hospitality of any kind from any pharmaceutical or allied health care industry. The Ethics Committee of the MCI will soon meet to decide the quantum of punishment for violation of any of these regulations. According to MCI president, Dr Ketan Desai, the council has brought in a blanket ban on gifts and hospitality of any kind.

"If we were to give any leverage by saying they can accept gifts worth less than Rs 1,000 or rail travel instead of air, it would have led to loopholes and lacunae that would have been taken advantage of. To stop a practice that has become so entrenched, we need to start with a guillotine effect and put a complete stop to it," said Dr Desai.

The MCI has made several regulations to amend the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations 2002. These came into effect on December 10 when they were published in the official gazette. State medical councils which have to implement these regulations have been sent copies of new regulations. The en masse travel of thousands of doctors with families for conferences will have to end, because only speakers and those chairing sessions can be sponsored according to the new regulations. The delegates of conferences, seminars, CMEs etc. cannot take money from any pharma company for travel. "A medical practitioner shall not accept any travel facility inside or outside the country, including rail, air, ship, cruise ticket, paid vacations etc. from any pharma or allied health industry for self and family members," says the MCI notification.

It has banned any doctor taking any money either for individual purpose or for research from the pharma and healthcare industry. For research, money can only be taken through approved institutions according to the modalities/law/rules of such approved institutions in a transparent manner.

But the doctors have to ensure that the research proposal has the required approval from the concerned authority, that it has the necessary clearance from the appropriate ethics body, that the source and amount of funding is disclosed right at the beginning and also ensure that there is a clause in the MoU for such an assignment that makes sure that the doctor shall have the freedom to publish the results of the research in the greater interest of the society.

The regulations stipulate that doctors cannot endorse any drug or product publicly and add that any study on the efficacy or otherwise of a product will have to be presented to an appropriate scientific body or published in a credible scientific journal.

Bitter Pill?

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