



Senator Seeks Financial Details From Medical Groups

Written On December 10, 2009 By [Bob Kraft](#)

As reported in the New York Times, Republican Senator Charles Grassley has sent letters to the American Medical Association, the American Cancer Society and 31 other disease and medical advocacy organizations asking them to provide details about the amount of money that they and their directors receive from drug and device makers. This inquiry may be aimed at determining whether any money received from drug and device makers is tied to the groups' efforts to lobby on health issues that favor the industry. Here are excerpts from the newspaper article:

Mike Lynch, a spokesman for the A.M.A., said the organization had received the senator's letter and would respond. He said industry funding comprised less than 2 percent of the organization's budget. Steve Weiss, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society, sent an e-mail stating that the society "holds itself to the highest standards of transparency and public accountability, and we look forward to working with Senator Grassley to provide the information he requested." Kate Meyer, a spokeswoman for the Alzheimer's Association, which also received a letter from the senator, said the organization "was going to answer all of his questions," but she would not immediately say what share of the organization's funding comes from drug or device makers.

The letter from the Iowa Republican is part of his long-running investigation into the pervasive influence of drug and device makers on the practice of medicine. Mr. Grassley has also long been interested in how charities get and spend their tax-deductible contributions.

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Earlier this year, Mr. Grassley sent a similar letter to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. In response, the group told the senator that more than two-thirds of its donations come from the pharmaceutical industry. In response to the disclosure, Dr. H. Richard Lamb, a board member for the alliance, resigned.

In an interview, Dr. Lamb said that NAMI's dependence on the drug industry made some actions impossible. For instance, Dr. Lamb said that NAMI should consider warning against the use of some drugs with life-threatening side effects. But the organization could not consider such a move since doing so could threaten much of its funding, Dr. Lamb said.

Mr. Grassley's request that organizations provide details about the outside income of directors may cause some consternation. While a few large patient advocacy groups have provided general guidance about their reliance on industry, almost none has given such details about their leaders.