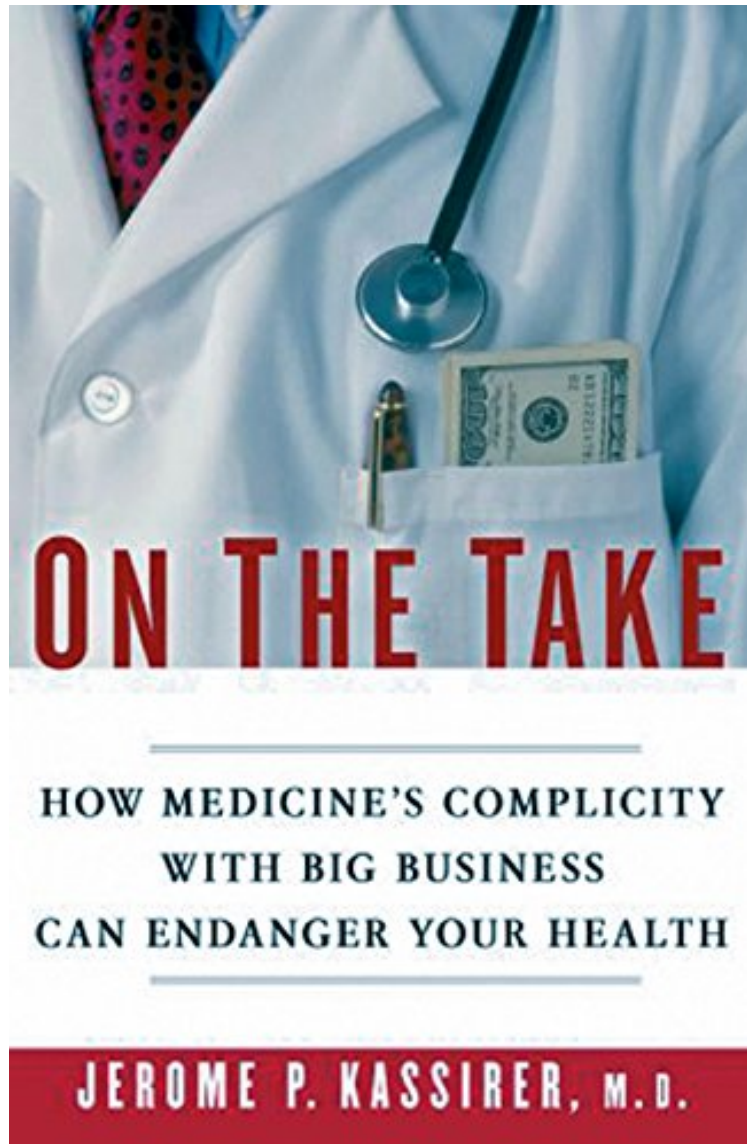


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On the Take: How Medicine's Complicity with Big Business Can Endanger Your Health

Jerome P. M.D. Kassirer

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Jerome P. M.D. Kassirer : On the Take: How Medicine's Complicity with Big Business Can Endanger Your Health before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On the Take: How Medicine's Complicity with Big Business Can Endanger Your Health:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The sad truthBy CamberThe recent financial meltdown illustrates yet again how capitalism is vulnerable to exploitation and serious instability because of greed. Our health care system is a particularly egregious example of this problem. A major reason why costs are spiralling is rather obvious if one

pays attention: drug companies, medical technology companies, insurance companies, hospitals, and some (not all) doctors and researchers are simply making too much money! They get away with it because a shell game has been set up in which the costs are largely hidden in Medicare/Medicaid and insurance premiums, with insurance premiums in turn hidden as "employer benefits." But rest assured that you and I (the public) are paying for all of this through increased taxes, reduced incomes, and higher costs of products and services. After all, where else but the public does money ultimately come from? All of this is context for this book by Dr. Jerome Kassirer, a highly respected doctor who was Chief Editor of the New England Journal of Medicine for over 8 years. Kassirer particularly focuses on how drug companies (and medical technology companies) use every method they can to try to influence doctors to use and promote their products, thus imposing greatly increased cost on the public, often with little or no health benefit, and often at increased risk to the public due to unnecessary or inappropriate research participation, testing, and treatment. Big pharma especially spends a huge amount of money pushing drugs (more than \$30,000/year per doctor!) because their resulting boost in profit is even higher, and they employ methods which are routinely unethical and sometimes illegal. Many (not all) doctors collude in this ruse because they naively and wrongly believe that their judgment is not being adversely affected (countless anthropological and psychological studies on gift exchange refute this), and some are motivated outright by greed because they make a lot of money in the process. As one might expect, this corruption extends not just to individual doctors, but also to hospitals, research institutions, and medical professional organizations, among others. When the medical profession is "on the take" in this way, not only does cost and risk to the public go up, but a vital bond based on trust is also broken, to the detriment of everyone. Kassirer's solution is tight governmental regulation with a high level of transparency. This solution is not only appropriate, but it's also pretty much the only viable option we have, since we can already see that the medical profession isn't going to adequately regulate itself, and drug companies will certainly continue to do whatever they can get away with. Of course, as with capitalism in general, the problem is that these various participants in the lucrative health care system are wealthy special interests, and they will do whatever they can to resist regulation which goes against their financial interest. Kassirer is aware of this and he recommends that the public apply pressure to help implement such regulation, but I worry that it won't happen, at least not until we reach the point of extreme crisis (we're certainly getting there). Time will tell, and suppose I should try to be optimistic ... Meanwhile, for anyone who wants to learn more about this disturbing situation (to put it mildly), I can certainly recommend this book. Kassirer is eminently qualified to write it, his tone is measured and balanced, and he provides plenty of detailed data and examples to back up his assertions (the details are actually more than I needed, but I can see that he had to provide them).

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A "must read" for anyone taking prescription drugs
By Mary
Must read for anyone whose doctor pushes prescription medicines on them. Much of the research is flawed and many of the drugs are not safe. I know the author, who's a physician and a true whistle blower, willing to tell the truth even if it meant losing friendships among less honest or greedy physicians. If only we had better controls on the pharmaceutical industry, and more doctors willing to tell the truth, we'd be able to trust the labels instead of putting our lives in danger.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. On the Take :How Medicine's Complicity with Big Business Can Endanger Your Health
By Patrick L. Franklin
I work for a Pharmaceutical Company so have been aware for a long time of the relationships Big Pharma foster with business to sell their products. However even I was stunned by the financial relationships that many leading Medical personnel have with Pharmaceutical companies. The author does a great job of laying bare these relationships and pointing out the consequences for patients relying on the so called impartiality of doctors so they make choices of drugs based on their efficacy and safety rather than prescribing drugs based on free so called Educational seminars in salubrious surroundings where the doctor is wined and dined at the expense of Big Pharma. The FDA is shown for the corrupt organisation it is ,dependent on funding from the Pharmaceutical Industry.
On the Take: How Medicine's Complicity with Big Business Can Endanger Your Health

We all know that doctors accept gifts from drug companies, ranging from pens and coffee mugs to free vacations at luxurious resorts. But as the former Editor-in-Chief of The New England Journal of Medicine reveals in this shocking expose, these innocuous-seeming gifts are just the tip of an iceberg that is distorting the practice of medicine and jeopardizing the health of millions of Americans today. In *On the Take*, Dr. Jerome Kassirer offers an unsettling look at the pervasive payoffs that physicians take from big drug companies and other medical suppliers, arguing that the billion-dollar onslaught of industry money has deflected many physicians' moral compasses and directly impacted the everyday care we receive from the doctors and institutions we trust most. Underscored by countless chilling untold stories, the book illuminates the financial connections between the wealthy companies that make drugs and the doctors who prescribe them. Kassirer details the shocking extent of these financial enticements and explains how they encourage bias, promote dangerously misleading medical information, raise the cost of medical care, and breed distrust. Among the questionable practices he describes are: the disturbing number of senior academic physicians who have financial arrangements with drug companies; the unregulated "front" organizations that advocate certain drugs; the creation of biased medical education materials by the drug companies themselves; and the use of financially conflicted physicians to write clinical practice guidelines or to testify before the FDA in support of a particular drug. A

brilliant diagnosis of an epidemic of greed, *On the Take* offers insight into how we can cure the medical profession and restore our trust in doctors and hospitals.

From *Publishers Weekly* "Some physicians become known as whores." This is strong language in Kassirer's mostly temperate but tough look at how big business is corrupting medicine; but according to Kassirer, one doctor's wife used the word "whore" to describe her husband's accepting high fees to promote medical products. Such personal anecdotes distinguish Kassirer's look at the conversion of America's health-care system into a commercial enterprise. Kassirer, former editor-in-chief of the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*, notes the range of conflicts of interest between profit-centered business and people-centered medicine, such as the drug industry's huge expenditures (in the billions) for courting doctors to use their products, for recruiting physicians to tout their drugs or, more slyly, to present seemingly objective medical discussions that, on closer examination, do favor the company's product over others. Kassirer also covers the abuses of both fee-for-service (which can lead doctors to perform unnecessary but lucrative tests and procedures) and HMOs (which reward doctors for keeping costs down). The author calls for more scrutiny of the health-care industry by Congress and a "sustained public outcry against inappropriate practices"; the banning of industry gifts to medical personnel; and—difficult to imagine—disclosure to patients by doctors of financial incentives they are receiving. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *The New England Journal of Medicine* The profession of medicine encompasses a wide variety of ways in which a physician can dedicate his or her life within the traditional areas of clinical practice, research, education, and administration. In this book, Jerome Kassirer, a former editor-in-chief of the *Journal*, documents, with well-referenced examples, how conflicts of interest, primarily financial in nature, have infiltrated all areas of the profession. The audience for the book is clearly the U.S. public, who, the author writes, "must become involved if we are to change the greed culture that permeates medicine." I agree, in principle, with the author that there are substantial conflicts of interest within the medical profession. However, I question the potential effectiveness of this book as written for the public. The most obvious reason for a physician of Kassirer's stature as a clinician, academician, and former editor to write a book about conflicts of interest in medicine would be to continue his attempts to eliminate or at least decrease a problem that diminishes the profession. But is this book a good way to accomplish that goal? The book wavers between a scholarly work and a sensational expose. For example, the cover features a man wearing a white coat and a neat shirt and tie, with a stethoscope around his neck and a pricey pen and a few crisp \$100 bills tucked in his pocket. I was taken aback by the image, which is clearly meant to depict a "fat cat doc" on the take. However, this jarring image is then tempered by the two opening sentences of the first chapter, which declare that most physicians are hard-working and dedicated to their patients and that perhaps even hundreds of thousands of physicians refuse to take any financial gift that might affect their clinical judgment. Then, aside from a few selected exceptions to that supposed rule, the rest of the book is dedicated to stories about physicians tainted by financial self-interest that altered how they cared for patients, how their research was conducted and reported, what they taught, and how they administered medical institutions, with evidence that all of these conflicts of interest led to the detriment of patient care. The final chapter discusses "what can be done," ending with a "possible roadmap" that includes 10 items for immediate implementation that would be possible primarily by legislation. The reader is asked to take a political stand to force the enactment of such legislation. If the reader were to take such action, the author would deserve a medal. However, if the reader's more likely reaction would be to view with distrust all physicians currently practicing in the United States, it would be unfortunate indeed and would undermine the very reason that the book was written. Catherine D. DeAngelis, M.D., M.P.H. Copyright copy; 2004 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The *New England Journal of Medicine* is a registered trademark of the MMS. "A surprisingly bare-knuckled book by one of the last editors-in-chief at the *New England Journal of Medicine*." --Mother Jones "A temperate but tough look at how big business is corrupting medicine." --Publishers Weekly "An important and thought-provoking analysis of the extensive conflicts of interest that pervade the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and the medical profession. This book is a wake-up call for physicians, policy-makers, and the public." --Senator Edward M. Kennedy "His quiet fury is palpable as he watches his beloved medical profession being corrupted by businesses willing to do whatever it takes to get their drugs prescribed." --American Scientist "From this book's title to its final words... Jerome P. Kassirer slams his fellow physicians.... 'It shouldn't have to be patients' responsibilities to protect themselves against the medical profession,' Kassirer writes. Bravo to that." --Tom Graham, *Washington Post Book World* "Documents with well-referenced examples, how conflicts of interest, primarily financial in nature, have infiltrated all areas of the profession." --*New England Journal of Medicine* "On the Take should be required reading for anyone concerned about the future of medicine in this country. Kassirer has shined a much-needed spotlight on the dark underbelly of physicians' financial dealings with industry. He argues compellingly that the corrupting influence of money is now so entrenched that the medical profession alone may not be able to save itself from rank commercialism. Public outrage at the unconscionable practices documented in this book may be our only hope of redirecting the medical profession away from overweening self-interest and back towards its moral purpose--protecting patients' interests. If readers of this book are not outraged at what they learn, hope for a future of beneficent medicine may

indeed be lost."--Jordan J. Cohen, M.D., President, Association of American Medical Colleges"Kassirer...has taken on the daunting task of documenting the varied and ingenious ways in which his fellow physicians have managed to accept money and gifts from pharmaceutical companies without calling the practice 'bribery'.... One virtue of this fine book, at least as a muckraking exhibit, is that its author, a physician of the old school, has been around long enough to see a lot of unraked muck.... You have to admire Kassirer's willingness to call a spade a spade."--American Prospect"On the Take describes the web of financial interests that entangles many doctors and threatens their objectivity and professionalism. Equally bad, financial conflicts of interest can undermine public trust in doctors. In this book, Dr. Jerome P. Kassirer diagnoses the malady as systemic, widespread, and insidious. Dr. Kassirer's powerful account will make it hard for anyone to deny that a serious problem exists and demands attention. On the Take deserves to be read by everyone who has a stake in the future integrity of medicine and health care."--Harvey V. Fineberg, President, The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences"Dr. Jerome Kassirer authoritatively describes the emerging immersion of the practice of medicine into the activities of the pharmaceutical and medical device world. As medicine itself has become a big business, the duties of the physician to the patient are in danger of being compromised and subverted. Personal vignettes from the author's experience lend credibility to many of the dangers described. The observations are disturbing and the implications profound." --Joseph B. Martin, M.D., Ph.D., Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University