3 answers to know about Sunshine Act data going public

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The second release of physicians’ financial data under the Physician Payments Sunshine Act, also known as the Open Payments program, was June 30. Learn the three questions patients or others may ask you about your 2014 financial data and how to answer them.

The program is the Center for Medicare & Medicaid’s (CMS) attempt to increase transparency and accountability in health care, but the program’s inaugural year was plagued with inaccurate data and a prohibitive registration and review process.

Here are three questions you’ll most likely hear and sample talking points for giving a thoughtful response:

- **Why do physicians get money or items of value from the industry?** Physicians interact with the industry in many ways, including as consultants, speakers, researchers and recipients of “items of value.” These interactions generally benefit patients. For instance, items of value physicians often receive are medical journal reprints and certain patient education materials.

- **Don’t relationships with the industry influence physicians’ decisions and recommendations?** The medical profession always is aware of the potential for conflicts of interest. But a relationship with the industry doesn’t automatically mean that a physician’s judgment has been influenced inappropriately. Industry support for research and development has been essential for developing new interventions and technologies to improve patient care and reduce health care costs.

- **How could individual physicians be justified in accepting large sums of money from the industry?** While there probably are some instances when physicians received money that, in retrospect, they should not have accepted, there are legitimate reasons that a physician could be listed as having accepted a large sum of money. For instance, many physicians receive funds to support clinical trials, an essential component of advancing medical knowledge around specific conditions and treatments.


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Visit the AMA’s Open Payments Web page for additional resources, including detailed talking points (log in) to help explain the June 30 data release to your patients and step-by-step instructions for how to register to review and dispute your data.

If you weren’t able to review and dispute your financial data by May 20, you may see inaccuracies. However, you still can review and dispute errors, and corrections will be reflected in the next scheduled update of the database. **Want to know what the AMA has been doing about this issue?** Read how the AMA has been advocating for an overhaul of how the Sunshine Act has been implemented. In addition, the AMA issued a media guide ahead of the program’s initial data release and is encouraging the media to make sure their reports about this data are presented in an accurate and informative way.