The policing of it is all voluntary, with no mandatory disclosures, so it is highly likely that the self-reporting does not reflect the real situation... as little as 55% of payments can actually be attributed to individual doctors.

Nofreelunch

I am a nobody. A bang average medical student who found a home working in the inner city of Glasgow. I also felt like a square peg in a round hole but I tried hard to fit in with my chosen profession. Twenty years ago drug reps were omnipresent in general practice, providing lunch and restaurant nights out, paying for Christmas parties, and offering international trips and endless freebies. I accepted the status quo because it was all I knew, for the hospitals had been just the same. Doctors were entitled.

And when I became the local prescribing lead this largess escalated with offers of a lot more hospitality and highly paid teaching opportunities. In the late nineties during the statin wars, a rep cupped my ear and simply said 'money', wanting me to promote Lipobay. I heard stories of far, far worse excess too. Money skewed everywhere. Doctors bragged that they were too intelligent to be influenced by the largess, but the prescribing numbers told a very different story. I stopped seeing reps because it just seemed the right thing to do. I then stumbled across nofreelunch.org, started speaking out, and wrote some complaints to the ABPI. Never did I imagine anyone would listen or take notice. But it was a message that many wanted to hear because there is no such thing as a free lunch.

What to do? If doctors think their advice is so important to advance medical research, why not give it for free? Or give this cash directly back to the NHS? If consultants want to attend conferences then they should pay for them themselves. The conference circuit is just hospitality masquerading as education, and has little more value than a simple webinar. It takes two to tango, so why not give it for free? Cash is still stinks. It’s time for nobody doctors to behave and after two decades the situation still stinks. It’s time for nobody doctors to speak out; post your stories of excess to fit in with my chosen profession. Twenty years ago drug reps were omnipresent in general practice, providing lunch and restaurant nights out, paying for Christmas parties, and offering international trips and endless freebies. I accepted the status quo because it was all I knew, for the hospitals had been just the same. Doctors were entitled.

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This is no way for public servants to behave and after two decades the situation still stinks. It’s time for nobody doctors to speak out; post your stories of excess because there is no such thing as a free lunch.

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