

Reply

We would like to express our thanks for the valuable comment of Dandel et al. (1) on our recent article in the *Journal* (2) regarding the use of tissue Doppler imaging (TDI) as a new prognosticator in cardiac diseases. The authors draw attention to the potential role of TDI in cardiac transplantation. We recognize their unique work using myocardial systolic and early diastolic velocities, as well as acceleration for detecting transplant rejection and coronary heart disease (3). Because our article was a review, we aimed to provide a useful overview of TDI applications, in particular for common cardiac diseases. Therefore, we did not include after-cardiac-transplant patients because they are not commonly encountered in the clinical practice of most physicians. Furthermore, the article mainly explored the role of established TDI parameters for estimating prognosis in terms of major cardiovascular events and/or mortality. Therefore, it included mostly studies that had at least medium-term follow-up for the prediction of hard cardiovascular events. Although transplant rejection and development of coronary heart disease may indicate a worse prognosis, we would be very interested to see such follow-up data provided by this group and others.

With respect to the prognostic role of deformation imaging, we are intrigued by the extensive application of 2-dimensional strain and strain rate imaging in various patients who received cardiac surgery or cardiac surgical devices. However, many of these potential applications still lack major published data to support their regular clinical usage, not to mention their prognostic role, which will need additional follow-up assessment. Lastly, although 2-dimensional speckle tracking analysis of strain has been recently validated (4) as another technique for deformation imaging, more studies are needed to characterize the clinical application(s) of this new tool, including its value as a prognosticator.

***Cheuk-Man Yu, MD, FRCP, FRACP**
John E. Sanderson, MD, FRCP, FACC
Thomas H. Marwick, MD, PhD, FACC
Jae K. Oh, FACC

*Li Ka Shing Institute of Health Sciences,
Institute of Vascular Medicine
S. H. Ho Cardiovascular and Stroke Centre
Division of Cardiology
Department of Medicine and Therapeutics
Prince of Wales Hospital, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, N. T. SAR
Hong Kong
E-mail: cmyu@cuhk.edu.hk

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Physicians Are Not Immune to Marketing

We were pleased that your recent editorial “Your Soul for a Pen?” (1) explored an issue of paramount importance for medicine today. Aggressive marketing to physicians has created real and perceived conflicts of interest and casts doubt on the appropriateness of treatment choices. The editorial observes, and we concur, that lavish gifts with no educational component must be eliminated and that gifts of any size erode public trust in the medical community. The evidence for these points is overwhelming; we, too, are aware of the research showing that even small gifts can affect prescribing behavior. We also agree that drug companies would not dispense token gifts unless they had impact.

We were, therefore, surprised and dismayed that the editorial went on to maintain that physicians are able to resist the influence of gifts. Gifts do set off powerful psychosocial dynamics, promoting a felt need, conscious or unconscious, to reciprocate. No less important, gifts serve as an entrée to physicians’ offices so that drug reps can promote their products.

For these reasons, The Prescription Project is working to promote policies that more effectively govern financial ties between the medical profession and industry. These include a ban on gifts. Ensuring that physician-industry relationships are free of conflicts of interest and that physicians base their prescribing decisions on accurate and unbiased information is essential to sound medical practice and public confidence in the profession.

***Rob Restuccia**
David J. Rothman
Susan Chimonas
Marcia Hams

*Executive Director
The Prescription Project
30 Winter Street
10th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
E-mail: rrestuccia@communitycatalyst.org

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Reply

As is apparent from the letter by Mr. Restuccia and colleagues, we are in agreement on most, and notably the most important, issues regarding interaction between physicians and medical industry (1). Where we seem to disagree is in the matter of degree. I believe there are gradations in the magnitude of “gifts,” and that gifts of

very small value, by virtue of their worth and ubiquity, have virtually no influence on physicians. I credit physicians with the intelligence, savvy, and integrity to see these for what they are and not let them affect their judgment. In fact, if small tokens such as pens, notepads, or a slice of pizza facilitate the education of physicians, I am all for them. I am afraid that some are taking an “all or none” approach to physician/industry interactions and run the danger that is always present in such positions. Conducting a major high-profile campaign against these small gifts may be seen as going after a mosquito with a cannon. We may lose sight of the important goals we are trying to achieve by focusing on those of less significance. Prohibition of alcohol failed, in some part, because a majority of the population believed that it was a disproportionate action for the problem posed. It would be a pity

if the legitimate need to address potential abuses in the interaction of physicians and industry met a similar fate for the same reasons.

***Anthony N. DeMaria, MD, MACC**

*Division of Cardiology
University of California, San Diego
200 West Arbor Drive
San Diego, California 92103
E-mail: ademaria@acc.org

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