

# **The Effect of Free Samples on Prescribing, Patient Care and Health Care Costs**

**Testimony before  
the Vermont Attorney General and  
the Commission on Health Care  
by  
Community Catalyst**

**Ian Reynolds  
October 27, 2009**



Community Catalyst is a national non-profit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to making quality, affordable health care accessible to everyone.

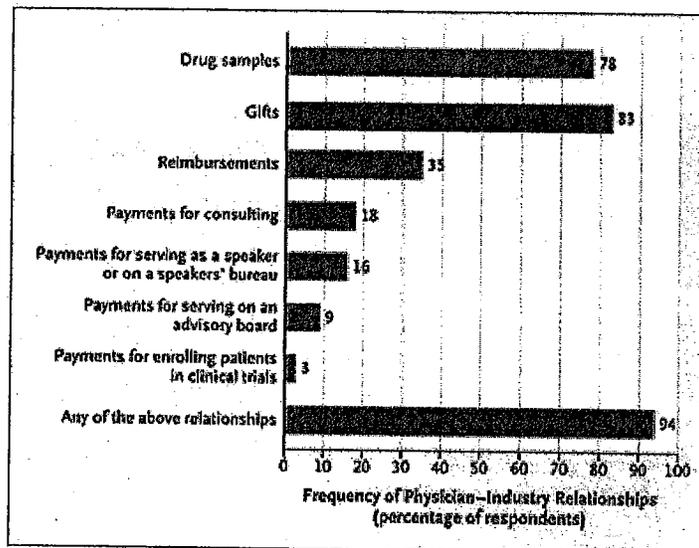
- Founded in 1997, Community Catalyst works in over 40 states to help advocacy organizations and grassroots groups build expertise and organizational capacity,
- Collaborate with stakeholders across health care sectors to effect positive change.



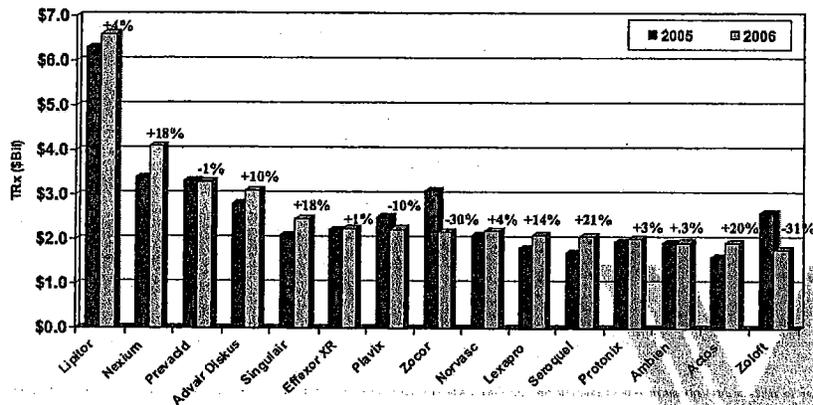


## Rx Marketing Impact on Costs

- Marketing consumes 30% of cost of drugs
- Expensive, newer drugs a focus
- Samples are for brand-name drugs
- 17% of drug cost increases due to switches to more expensive drugs
- Generics cost 30-80% less



## Leading products in retail sales



Source: Verispan, 2006

## Who receives samples?

- 12% of US residents received free samples during 2003 (Survey, 2008) \*
  - Less than one third of all sample recipients were low income
  - Less than one fifth of all sample recipients were uninsured at any point during the year.
- Physicians, office staff and sales reps commonly use samples intended for patients\*\*

\* Cutrona et al. 2008. Characteristics of Recipients of Free Prescription Drug Samples: A Nationally Representative Analysis. *Am. J Public Health*

\*\* Westfall et al. 1997. *JAMA*, 1997

Tong et al, 1995. *Canadian Family Physician*



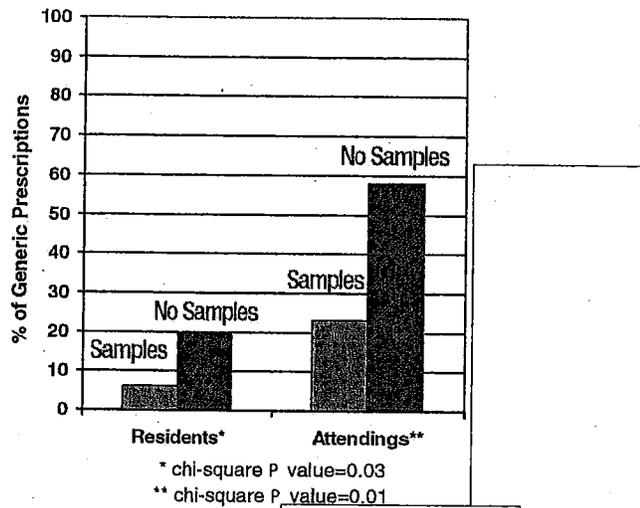


Fig. 2 Generic prescribing to uninsured patients by prescriber level of training.



COMMUNITY CATALYST

Miller et al. 2008. Impact of Drug Samples on Prescribing to the Uninsured. *Southern Medical Journal*

## Do Samples Save Patients Money?

- Samples only available for newer, heavily marketed drugs
- Doctors who use samples use more expensive drugs
- Comparison of 23 similar practices (Symm et al, 2006) found:
  - Physicians at clinic distributing samples had higher prescribing costs
  - Prescribing patterns correlated with samples dispensed



COMMUNITY CATALYST

## Michigan Samples Policy

Drug samples, while convenient for patients, entail regulatory concerns, safety risks for patients, and encourage prescribing of high cost, non-preferred medications. Therefore, with limited exceptions, sample medications are not permitted in UMHC facilities.



## IOM Recommendations

### Discussion and Conclusions:

- Many MDs believe samples critical for indigent patients
- Research suggests most samples not given to patients with financial need
- Physicians may change prescribing practices if use samples
- Lack of access to affordable medications serious, but samples are "not a satisfactory answer to this serious societal problem"
- AMCs should at a minimum oversee and restrict use

Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education and Practice  
Institute of Medicine, April 21, 2009.



## Vermont Disclosure Policy

- Community Catalyst recommends public disclosure vs. disclosure only to the AG
- Rationale:
  - Allows patients to see samples distribution across providers
  - Allows health plans and researchers to look at samples in relation to DTCA, promotions to prescribers (available under VT law) and utilization of drugs in public and private programs
  - Physician peer learning, given range of use
  - May lower distribution to non-patients (staff, MDs etc)
  - May identify gaps in Rx safety net among low income patients that can be addressed in other ways



## Community Catalyst

**30 Winter St. 10th Floor  
Boston, MA 02108  
[www.prescriptionproject.org](http://www.prescriptionproject.org)  
617-275-2853**

**Ian Reynolds, Project Associate  
Prescription Access and Quality  
Community Catalyst**

