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July 22, 2015

Letters to the Editor  
Times Union  
Albany, New York 12212

To the Editor:

While Dr. Goldenberg was busy accusing insurance companies of putting their bottom lines above the recommendation of medical professionals, he was also busy accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars from drug companies looking to promote products that help the bottom lines of both the drug companies and the doctors they woo. His hypocritical tirade against health plans should be labeled what it is: a biased conflict of interest.

According to ProPublica's *Dollars for Docs* interactive search tool of drug and device companies' payments to doctors, from August of 2013 through December of 2014, Dr. Goldenberg received 354 separate payments from 22 different companies that totaled more than \$325,000. The compensation was not for research but rather for consulting, public speaking and expenses related to these efforts, and rank him second out of 685 doctors in his specialty in New York for state for such payments. ProPublica's information comes from new data on doctors and hospitals released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Health plans use step therapy programs — having patients try less costly medications (i.e., generics) before accessing more expensive ones — for a number of reasons other than profit. Paramount to plans' use of these policies is consumer protection — both in terms of cost savings and safety.

As increased utilization, price inflation and higher cost drugs continue to drive up prescription spending — one of the fastest rising components of health care costs — tools such as step therapy help keep prescription coverage and premiums affordable. Additionally, patients constantly steered toward higher cost medications have higher out of pocket costs (i.e., a \$4/month generic versus a \$60/month brand name drug can represent a savings of more than \$670 over the course of the year — and that's one drug, for someone on multiple drugs, multiply the savings).

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Then there are quality of care concerns. “Newest” doesn’t always necessarily mean “safest” and there are documented cases where drugs rushed to market have later been pulled off due to adverse effects. Pharmaceutical manufacturers’ incentives to physicians and consumers often result in patients being prescribed new drugs over equally effective generics. Step therapy can act as a watchdog in insuring only clinically appropriate regimens are covered and help curtail the abuse of prescription drug utilization. When there is a dispute about what treatment is truly best for a given patient, existing exceptions procedures and New York’s “Dispense As Written” prescribing law can and do override the step therapy policy.

The public is entitled to know there are two sides to every story and that Dr. Goldenberg’s righteous statements should be taken with a grain of salt in light of his financial interests in pharmaceutical promotions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul F. Macielak", written in a cursive style.

Paul F. Macielak

President & CEO

New York Health Plan Association