



## **Eli Lilly first in pharma to post funding online**

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**INDIANAPOLIS: Eli Lilly and Co. has become the first major pharmaceutical company to voluntarily post online all information regarding educational grant funding and other contributions provided to US organizations.**

The announcement is a critical move as pharma companies try to reverse public opinion of the industry, which has been slipping consistently in recent years. Eli Lilly also plans to list funding information on its company's grant office Web site, which will be updated quarterly and offer details of the funds' intended use.

"There have been critics who've questioned the integrity of these funds, and this is, in a sense, a call to be more transparent around this funding and to let folks know that we are not ashamed of this funding and, in fact, are very proud of the way it contributes back to our society," said Ed Sagebiel, manager of corporate communications for Eli Lilly.

Sagebiel confirmed that Chandler Chicco Agency handles corporate communications for Eli Lilly, but said the decision to voluntarily post the information was mainly an internal one.

In its first posting, Eli Lilly said last week it had given \$11.8 million to 495 organizations over the first three months of the year. The gifts do not include the Lilly Foundation, which acts as a charitable organization separate from the company. Sagebiel said the company would update the posting quarterly.

Grants to organizations, such as medical societies, academic centers, patient groups, and non-profits, are awarded according to specific guidelines, which will also now be posted online. Typically, the company's grants focus on therapeutic areas where Eli Lilly has expertise, such as cancer, diabetes, and neuroscience.

"We had reviewed this information over the last year, and we felt good about the fact that we believe that this funding contributes in a very positive manner to the healthcare system," said Sagebiel. "Our hope is that this will create more of a sea change [of] transparency around this issue."

Whether that happens remains to be seen, but a recent study by Envision Solutions, a healthcare communications consultancy, indicated that the population was skeptical of pharma's motivation for supporting non-profit organizations. According to the survey, 43 percent of adults in the country believe drug firms fund non-profit groups in order to sell more product.

"From a communications perspective I think it's great that Eli Lilly has made this move," said Fard Johnmar, founder of Envision Solutions. "Proactive communication is certainly one of the things that should be done to decrease some of the negative perceptions people have of the company."

In April, the Senate Finance Committee concluded its investigation into pharmaceutical companies by reporting the companies had used the contributions to expand their markets for new medications, according to a draft copy of the committee's report.

"I would say that the drug industry has really earned the skepticism of the public, and I would agree this has been a long time coming," said Diane Farsetta, senior researcher for the Center of Media and Democracy. "This is a small step in the right direction, but it is one they were dragged to do because of the poor image of the industry and also in part due to the Senate Finance Committee's investigation."

Sagebiel said the announcement is just one part of the company's continuing communications efforts to provide transparency and answers for patients, the medical community, and the general public.

"I wouldn't be surprised if other pharmaceutical companies did something similar," Farsetta said. "This is a real issue and it's something that more and more people are aware of, questioning both research that's funded by pharmaceutical companies as well as they patient group funding."