Never has there been more scrutiny of the gift-giving relationship between industry and physicians, both clinicians and investigators. While such scrutiny is both overdue and well-deserved, greater attention needs be paid to extensive social science research explaining how conflicts of interest affect human behavior, and how they do not. That is, there are strong reasons to believe both that the influence a conflict has on human behavior is only weakly correlated with the size of the gift, and that managing conflicts after they have arisen is a poor remedy because at that point the influence has already affected the behavior. What is needed is a more complex and more accurate picture of the ways that conflicts of interest affect behavior.

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