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Reaction to the Senate Committee on Finance Report on Medtronic’s InFuse
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The North American Spine Society (NASS) would like to acknowledge the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance for its in-depth investigation into physician/industry relationships, scientific publishing and the marketing of a Medtronic product often used in spinal fusion surgery, bone morphogenetic protein 2 (rh-BMP2).

While the report confirms what was reported in the June 2011 issue of The Spine Journal, the committee’s access to Medtronic’s internal documents presents a more detailed and disturbing picture of what can go wrong when ethics and patient safety are compromised for profit.

Annually, millions of health care professionals make important health decisions with their patients based on the data published in scientific journals, presented at medical conferences and shared by colleagues and sales representatives. To protect the safety and health of all patients, NASS strongly advocates that this data be accurate, complete and that any potential conflict of interest that might result in bias is disclosed. NASS is hopeful that future research sponsored by Medtronic and others will adhere to much higher standards.

Disclosure & Transparency
Physician and industry collaborations can benefit patients, but these relationships must conform to the highest standards of ethics and disclosure. If surgeons had known that the lead authors of the 13 original studies on InFuse had received payments ranging from $1.7 to $64 million from Medtronic and that its marketing employees were co-authors and co-editors, would they have been as eager to use InFuse on their patients?

Long before “disclosure” became a watchword in the medical community, NASS recognized the critical importance of transparency in physician/industry relationships. In 2001, NASS adopted a stringent code of ethics for its members. In 2006, NASS adopted its aggressive disclosure policy, which requires universal and detailed disclosure of financial and other relationships for its presenters, committee members and authors. For example, The Spine Journal requires all authors to provide detailed financial information about their relationships with industry, which is provided to the reader accompanying each article.

The Spine Journal
NASS is pleased that its scientific, peer-reviewed publication, The Spine Journal, is singled out for its dedication to transparency and ethics in the Senate Finance Committee’s report. Under the thoughtful and courageous stewardship of Eugene Carragee, MD and its independent editorial team, The Spine Journal has elevated and protected the integrity of scientific publishing, and most importantly, the health and safety of patients.

NASS is a multidisciplinary medical organization dedicated to fostering the highest quality, evidence-based and ethical spine care by promoting education, research and advocacy. NASS is comprised of more than 6,500 members from several disciplines, including orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, psychiatry, neurology, radiology, anesthesiology, research, physical therapy and other spine care professionals.

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