

VERMONT MEDICAL SOCIETY

S. 45, An Act Relating to Providing Meals to Health Care Providers at Conferences – Statements in Support

(Received from 2/3/17-2/6/17)

Pediatrics/Neonatology, Burlington:

I attend several conferences which include food from sponsors, and know I cannot partake but have few other options. This is often the only food or beverage (other than public water fountains) available for a large radius, and it is not practical to enter a conference at 7AM with a packed lunch when traveling from a distance.

Much of the time it is not even from pharmaceutical companies, but from formula companies (I am a pediatrician), which are elsewhere exempt from the regulations. I am faced with either being hungry or violating the law, and in truth I see the signs from the companies regardless. I know that Mead Johnson sponsored the food at the last conference I attended, even if I did not partake – in fact I probably remember it more acutely as I was not able to eat. There have been times I have gone off-site to purchase food and have traveled and waited in long lines, missing up to 45 minutes of what I spent money to travel and see.

There are occasionally signs saying that Vermonters cannot have the food, even if part of our conference fee goes towards cosponsoring the food (as well as the formula or pharmaceutical company's money).

Internal Medicine, Montpelier:

Every year at my annual specialty conference (ACP's Internal Medicine 2017) I hasten to a lunchtime presentation only to be greeted by signs stating not open to Vermont clinicians, or to be stopped at the door because my name tag indicates Vermont, or to have my CME application rejected for the same reason. These conferences provide an opportunity to hear specialist presentations on specific conditions &/or specific medications while having a light lunch. Convenience is a big factor in the ability to have lunch within the convention center rather than missing important parts of the conference due to the distance necessary to travel to obtain lunch outside the convention center.

Neurologist, Burlington:

I have on multiple occasions at national meetings been banned from potential learning activities due to concerns that drug manufacturers have about the Vermont laws. In addition, this has impaired my socialization and information sharing that occurs informally at many of these meetings with other attendees, which is an important part of attending these meetings to informally share experiences and build networks. Thank you for giving these concerns a voice.

Otorhinolaryngology (ENT), Burlington:

The Vermont law has been a problem for me, and I am happy to give personal stories:

- I have been the speaker on inflammatory and infectious disease topics at national and international meetings where food was served. I needed to leave the event, get a taxi, find "outside food", and return to the event in time for my presentation just because of the "Vermont Rule".

- I have missed important presentations because I was "persona non grata" due to the paperwork and rules hassle of being a Vermont physician.

I hope the VT legislature is able to adopt the federal rules, so we can be like the other 49 states. It is hard enough attracting good physicians to Vermont, and this is just one more hassle that gets in the way.

Dermatology, Burlington

I have had multiple experiences where lectures were being presented where I have not been permitted to attend. This has included annual meetings and programs. Several dinner meetings which included very well-respected, excellent lecturers were not open to MDs from . . . Vermont. These have included new and emerging medications and technologies. It is also very demeaning to be excluded from a group of colleagues

Cardiology APRN, Burlington:

I have been asked to repay the cost of a meal after the fact (telephoned me at work several months later). Had attended a multiday conference in Boston and told if I did not pay my name would be given to the Attorney General of VT for violation of VT law. It was a bagged lunch - sandwich and chips, apple that was given when attended a lunch time conference session. I since have avoided all lunch conferences so as not to have this happen again.

Pediatric Rheumatologist, Burlington:

I did have an experience several years ago when I attended a talk with dinner at a national meeting. I did not even think it would be a problem and there was no sign telling me about the VT ban. I was later contacted by the compliance officer at the pharmaceutical company and had to pay them something ridiculous for the cost of the buffet dinner, something in the 150 dollar range. The talk was informative. I was really embarrassed by the whole process. Am very wary of attending any meetings sponsored by pharma currently, it seems overly restrictive in my opinion. I am a pediatric rheumatologist and opportunities to learn are limited.

PA, Burlington:

PA-C with 12 year experience working in the field. Quick summary of my feelings/experiences on this:

- *Most CME conferences I go to involve a lunch program sponsored by a drug company, and so if you are from VT, you are not allowed to eat the food/etc, which creates the inconvenience of having to find food elsewhere in a situation that wasn't designed for that issue.*
- *I was billed \$50 by a drug company last year for a lunch I ate during a CME conference. I was told I would be reported to the state unless I wrote them a check for the \$50. The drug company in question was not clear at all at the time that I would be reported, but report me they did. It really bothered me that they have the ability to be flaky about making you aware of the rules, but can be on point about reporting you.*

This law needs to go away, or get more in line with the federal laws. VT healthcare providers end up getting embarrassed/ostracized at meetings

Vascular Surgeon, Burlington:

I have on several occasions been asked by industry to pay for food and coffee after the fact from CME conferences. I took a job at UVM directly out of fellowship and was naive to the law. My first year I fielded several awkward phone calls from reps asking for checks (ranging from 3\$ to 60\$) for food and coffee

Orthopedic PA, Burlington:

I had to skip cme sessions offered over lunch time because I had to eat lunch, but couldn't accept the free meal.

Nephrologist, Burlington:

At ancillary data presentations supported by industry at the American Society of Nephrology, physicians from Vermont are asked to hold up their hand when box lunches are passed out. You are then not given a lunch.

Cardiologist, Bennington:

The law is terrible and needs to be changed. I was at the American College of Cardiology meeting and could not attend a dinner/education program because I'm from Vermont. It's like a scarlet letter - there are big signs if you're from Vermont you can't attend- it's embarrassing. It does not help control pharmacy costs and impedes education.

Surgeon, Brattleboro:

I have been told on numerous occasions to stay away from their educational events.

PA, Burlington:

I have seen signs telling Vermont providers not to take food or drink at more than one CME conference. It is usually in the exhibition hall from certain vendors that have smoothies or snacks.