

Bribery

Professor Michael Rawlins, professor of clinical pharmacology at Newcastle University, said: "There is a certain amount of covert bribery.

"One drug company recently flew a lot of consultants to Spain to hear about their drugs. They invited me to go.

"If they were introducing their drugs to people in Newcastle, they wouldn't get such a good turnout, whereas going to Spain could whet appetites.

"When you talk to doctors, they always say, 'I go along and have their drink and I am not influenced by it,' but subconsciously they must be.

"The companies are not idiots. They would not do it if it was not worthwhile."

He agreed that there was a legitimate area in which drug companies had the responsibility to inform doctors about new products. But Professor Rawlins declared: "Education gets mixed up with financial rewards or other substitutes."