Medical device lobby spent $385K on lobbying in 1Q

The Associated Press

The medical device industry's chief advocacy group spent more than $385,000 lobbying Congress in the first three months of 2010, as lawmakers finalized the health care overhaul.

The group lobbied on the health care bill passed into law in March, which calls on medical device makers to pay between $2 billion and $3 billion in fees per year to fund expanding health care coverage.

AdvaMed, or the Advanced Medical Technology Association, also lobbied on efforts in Congress to make it easier for patients to sue medical device companies via personal injury lawsuits.

Medical device companies are largely shielded from patient lawsuits at the state level by a Supreme Court decision that gave federal regulators the final say in declaring a device safe or unsafe. Democrats, backed by trial lawyers and patient groups, want to overturn that decision, which they say misinterprets the law.

AdvaMed has argued that overriding the decision would allow state courts to second-guess medical experts and create a "patchwork of inconsistent and confusing guidance."

The association also lobbied on the system used for approving certain medical devices. For over 30 years the Food and Drug Administration has granted speedy approval to devices that are similar to products already on the market. This so-called 510(k) processes is cheaper and faster than the review process for first-of-a-kind devices, which must go through rigorous medical testing.

Some lawmakers and consumer advocates complain that the 510(k) system has been abused, allowing high-risk devices onto the market without proper review.

AdvaMed officials have voiced concern that a safety backlash could make it harder to get new devices on the market in a cost-efficient manner.

AdvaMed, which represents Medtronic, Boston Scientific among other companies, spent $385,025 in the first quarter of 2010, according to an April 20 filing. That was down from $284,569 spent on lobbying during the fourth quarter of 2009 and $364,638 in the prior-year period.

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