

## PRESS RELEASE

### Office of Councilmember David A. Catania

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 110, Washington, D.C. 20004

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Contact: Ben Young  
(202) 724-7772  
byoung@dccouncil.us  
<http://www.davidcatania.com>

## **BREAKING NEWS**

### **GROUNDBREAKING STUDY SHOWS PRESCRIPTION DRUG SAMPLES RARELY BENEFIT POOR AND UNINSURED**

#### **HARVARD RESEARCHERS ALSO SAY THAT SAMPLES MAY INFLUENCE DOCTORS' PRESCRIBING PATTERNS AND CAUSE SAFETY CONCERNS**

**Washington, D.C.** – A study released today by researchers at the Harvard Medical School and the Cambridge Health Alliance showed that poor and uninsured patients rarely benefit from prescription drug samples. The study marked the first-ever nationwide analysis of the distribution of free samples, a tool widely used by pharmaceutical companies. The study concluded that:

*Few free samples went to the needy...Free sample receipt was consistently higher among those with better access to medical care. Non-Hispanics, English-speakers and Whites were all more likely to receive free samples than were members of ethnic, linguistic or racial minorities." (<http://www.cha.harvard.edu>)*

The study's authors also offered a devastating critique of one of the pharmaceutical industry's chief arguments against the "SafeRx Act of 2007," authored by Councilmember David Catania (At-Large). According to a statement released earlier today:

*Author Sarah Cutrona, a physician at Cambridge Health Alliance and an Instructor of Medicine at Harvard commented: "The distribution of free samples has become very controversial. Evidence shows that free samples may influence physicians' prescribing behavior and cause safety problems. For instance, we found that the most widely distributed sample in 2002 was Vioxx, with Celebrex being number 3. These drugs turned out to have lethal side effects. While many doctors still view samples as a safety net for their neediest patients, **our study shows that samples are potentially dangerous, and do little for the needy.**"*

*Dr. David Himmelstein, senior author of the study, a physician at Cambridge Health Alliance and an Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard adds: "We know that many doctors try to get free samples to needy patients when those patients come into the office. We found that such efforts do not counter society-wide factors that determine access to care and selectively direct free samples to the affluent. **Our findings strongly suggest that free drug samples serve as a marketing tool, not as a safety net.**"*

*"Free drug samples are not the solution to the disproportionately low amount of health care resources going to the poor and uninsured; **they are part of the problem.**" said Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, a physician at Cambridge Health Alliance, Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard, and study co-author. (<http://www.cha.harvard.edu>)*

The study examined data on 32,681 U.S. residents and will be published in the February 2008 American Journal of Public Health. The Cambridge Health Alliance is an award-winning health system that provides high quality care in Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston's metro-north communities. It includes three hospital campuses, more than 20 primary care and specialty practices, the Cambridge Public Health Dept., and the Network Health plan. CHA is a Harvard Medical School teaching affiliate and is also affiliated with Harvard School of Public Health, Harvard School of Dental Medicine, and Tufts University School of Medicine. For more information, visit [www.cambridgehealthalliance.org](http://www.cambridgehealthalliance.org).

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