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Treating Disease With A Famous Face

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CELEBRITY Rx Lynda Carter lifts the veil

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HOW ARE YOU? Kelsey Grammer and his wife, Camille, discussing irritable bowel syndrome Julia Roberts before a House panel on the topic of Rett syndrome.

Amy Doner Schachtel, the president of Premier Entertainment Consulting, which competes with Mr. Greenberg's firm, arranged the marriage between Ms. Carter and Novartis.

She would not say how much Ms. Carter was paid, but fees for similar alliances can range from tens of thousands of dollars to $1 million, said Ms. Doner Schachtel, who has helped arrange paid deals for Mr. Lowe and Mr. Glover.

"Sometimes they are paid for a one-day appearance and sometimes they are paid for 20 days over the course of a year," Ms. Doner Schachtel said. "So the fees obviously vary."

Ms. Doner Schachtel, who has been linking celebrities with drug companies since 1996, maintains a database of stars and diseases. In the case of Ms. Carter, she spent months calling agents before finding a celebrity with a suitable connection to irritable bowel syndrome; Ms. Carter's mother has I.B.S.

Celebrity affiliation can, at times, attract much needed attention. Katie Couric, the co-host of "Today," has helped to raise about $20 million for colon cancer research since the death of her husband, Jay Monahan, in 1998.

Ms. Doner Schachtel said: "People can be skeptical of the celebrity angle. But the reality is that Americans listen to celebrities, not the medical expert who is unknown to them. How else are you going to get the word out so effectively on public health issues?"

Gregory Baird, the vice president for communications of Novartis, saw nothing wrong in the use of celebrities to market health care. "In the end, I think we're better if we can still find the Lynda Carters of the world who can say, 'Women, here is permission to talk about what you have,' " he said.