

Annexure 13 – INC Policy - Guidance on Interactions with Healthcare Professionals

Guidance on Interactions with Healthcare Professionals

The Infant Nutrition Council supports appropriate interactions between infant formula manufacturers and healthcare professionals, with the primary aim of providing scientific and factual information about infant and follow-on formulas. Interactions with healthcare professionals may include visits with company representatives, educational events, consultancy arrangements, and sponsorship of healthcare professionals.

For the purposes of this guidance document, the term *healthcare professional* includes, but is not restricted to, medical practitioners, pharmacists, nurses, midwives, dietitians and nutritionists. Pharmacy technicians or assistants are not considered healthcare professionals. However, it is recognised that they play an important role as part of the community pharmacy healthcare team, and as such may be provided with educational material and training on infant formula with the agreement or at the request of the relevant pharmacist.

1. Visits with Company Representatives

These visits should ideally occur at the workplace of the healthcare professional, but may take place at an appropriate alternative venue. Any hospitality provided during such visits must be modest, secondary to the intent of the interaction, and should be considered appropriate by a reasonable person based on the professional standing of the healthcare professionals in attendance.

2. Educational Events

The primary purpose of an educational meeting must be the enhancement of medical or scientific knowledge or product information, products. At company-organised meetings which relate to infant formula, the benefits of breastfeeding should always be clearly communicated. For company-organised educational meetings, venues should be chosen in reasonable proximity to the majority of delegates, and must not be considered by a reasonable person to be lavish or offer excessive hospitality. Companies may also sponsor third party meetings, but must ensure that these meetings contain a suitable level of medical or scientific education. The independence of external speakers educational content must be maintained at both company and third-party sponsored events.

3. Sponsorship of Healthcare Professionals

Companies may sponsor individual healthcare professionals to attend educational meetings within Australia or New Zealand, or at international venues. The choice of healthcare professional must be based on the individual's interest in the area of science being discussed and if required, their ability to communicate any relevant information gathered from these meetings.

It is recommended that when agreeing to provide sponsorship of a healthcare professional to attend an educational meeting, companies should have a formal letter of agreement with the individual that will receive the sponsorship.

In Australia, it is a requirement of the MAIF Agreement that companies disclose any such sponsorship (as well as fellowships or study tours) to the institution with which the recipient healthcare professional is affiliated, and this is also encouraged in New Zealand.

4. Consultancy Arrangements

Companies have a number of legitimate reasons for engaging healthcare professionals in consultancy arrangements, including as speakers at educational meetings, to provide scientific advice, prepare scientific reports, and for clinical or basic research. It is recommended that all such arrangements are formally documented in consultancy agreements, and any payments should be consistent with fair and usual market rates for the service provided.

In Australia, it is a requirement of the MAIF Agreement that companies disclose research grants to the institution with which the recipient healthcare professional is affiliated, and this is also encouraged in New Zealand.

5. Sponsorship of Healthcare Professional Practice Activities

Companies may sponsor bona fide activities aimed at improving patient health outcomes, provided that there is no direct financial benefit for the participating healthcare practices or professionals. Funding for practice staff involved in routine activities, or 'mothercraft nurses' or staff engaged in similar activities is not permitted.

6. Entertainment

The Infant Nutrition Council has agreed that no stand-alone entertainment should be provided to healthcare professionals. Examples of conduct which would not be considered acceptable include invitations to any sporting or artistic events, regardless of the cost or circumstance. This prohibition does not extend to entertainment provided to delegates at scientific conferences.

7. Travel

The cost of travel for delegates to educational meetings may be subsidised or paid for in full. For meetings held within Australia or New Zealand, it is recommended that travel ideally be by economy class only (unless there is a documented medical condition or on reasonable grounds which requires business class travel). However the professional standing of the healthcare professional may also be taken into consideration. For international travel either economy or business class is acceptable.

8. Venue / Accommodation

The cost of accommodation for delegates to educational meetings may also be subsidised or paid for in full.

The venue for educational meetings should be appropriate to the meeting, based on the type and length of meeting and facilities required and taking into account the standing of the delegates.

9. Hospitality

Hospitality in the form of food and beverages may be offered to healthcare professionals, but the cost must always be reasonable, and appropriate for the situation. The Infant Nutrition Council has agreed that hospitality should not be provided at venues which would be considered by a reasonable person to be lavish or excessive.

For both domestic and international educational events, accommodation costs may include an allowance for meals while travelling, and transfers. These allowances should reflect the professional standing of healthcare professionals, but should not be excessive.

10. Gifts

Gifts are not to be provided to healthcare professionals. In addition to the complying items above, exceptions to this requirement are the provision of educational items such as article reprints, or authoritative texts, and company branded stationery items for use at educational events. Competitions based on the acquisition of medical knowledge may also be conducted, where individual prizes must be directly relevant to the practice of the healthcare professional group(s) and not exceed what a reasonable person would consider excessive. No gifts should be provided to the families or friends of healthcare professionals.