

Why speaking at a formula event may be a problem

Formula company events are widely advertised to health workers throughout the country and this marketing by referring to the speaker's hospital and position in the hospital linked with a formula company may be perceived as endorsing this company and its products.

Improper practices in the marketing of breast-milk substitutes and related products can contribute to major public health problems. The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent resolutions was agreed by all countries as a means to protect babies, parents and health workers from inappropriate marketing practices. A Baby-friendly hospital is required to uphold both the letter and the spirit of the International Code. For example:

Article 7.3 No financial or material inducements to promote products within the scope of this Code should be offered by manufacturers or distributors to health workers or members of their families, nor should these be accepted by health workers or members of their families.

Article 7.5 Manufacturers and distributors of products within the scope of this Code should disclose to the institution to which a recipient health worker is affiliated any contribution made to him or on his behalf for fellowships, study tours, research grants, attendance at professional conferences, or the like. Similar disclosures should be made by the recipient.

Subsequent resolution Forty-ninth World Health Assembly May 1996

“ensure that ...financial support for professionals working in infant and young child health does not create conflicts of interest, especially with regard to the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.”

When a health worker links with a company and their marketing activities they may become influenced themselves by the marketing and perceive the company and its products as beneficial to infant well-being – generating good will towards the company is one of the aims of marketing. This may influence the health worker's support for breastfeeding; make it more difficult to refuse to make available in the hospital the marketing materials for that company's products, and may be reflected in recommendations made regarding suitable products for infants who are not breastfeeding.

Should hospital staff be allowed to use their hospital employment to market anything? For example, if a midwife who works part-time in a hospital and provides a private home birth service separate from the hospital allowed to use her position as a hospital midwife to market her private practice? Or can a hospital clerical officer use their position to market a vitamin supplement? Or a doctor use their hospital name to market a medication or treatment for a company?

A hospital may not be awarded or may be at risk of losing its designation as a Baby-friendly Hospital if staff use their positions and the hospital name to market infant formula or other products covered by the Code.

An individual may do what she/he wishes outside of the hospital when not describing themselves as a hospital staff member.



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