

Meetings arranged abroad must be approved by the Council for Drug Information.

Advertisements for drugs are not allowed in Internet-based courses that are recognised as part of specialist training and continuing medical education. For meetings, maximum rates for exhibition displays and advertisements may be agreed upon. Money from pharmaceutical companies for prizes and scholarships should be put into funds on which the pharmaceutical industry has no influence. Contributions from many companies should be encouraged. Pharmaceutical companies are not allowed to sponsor costs related to the administration of medical associations/societies, and support membership or unspecified contributions are not allowed.

Doctors are not allowed to ask for rent for rooms when pharmaceutical representatives are visiting a practice or hospital, but the pharmaceutical company may provide a modest meal. The values of gifts (medical literature, medical equipment) must not exceed 1,000 NOK (about 125 Euro). Doctors employed by a hospital or company must have the approval of their employer to do consultancy work for a pharmaceutical company.

Research cooperation

One chapter deals with research and drug development projects. Information on all projects that are not required to be approved by Norwegian drug authorities and/or regional ethical committees, must be sent to

the Council for Drug Information. Projects that may be regarded as concealed marketing are not allowed. Publication of results must be done according to the principals of good scientific conduct.

The new agreement between the Norwegian Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and the Norwegian Medical Association can be downloaded from the Internet (2).

Literature

1. Strand S, Andersen EJ. Ny avtale om forholdet til legemiddelindustrien [New agreement on relations with the pharmaceutical industry]. *Tidsskr Nor Lægeforen* 2005; 125: 207.
2. <http://www.legeforeningen.no/index.gan?id=55565&subid=0> (4.4 2005)

Relations Between Physicians and the Pharmaceutical Industry in Finland

Håkan Granlund

Dermatologist, Medical Director
Novartis, Finland
hakan.granlund@novartis.com

The nature and magnitude of contacts between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry in Finland are probably not all that different compared to the other Nordic countries. Contacts are mainly in the form of representative calls, supported domestic and international meetings,



lectures, and participation in clinical trials sponsored by the industry. During recent years, the traditional contacts in form of representative calls have decreased in popularity. The industry has noticed difficulties

in upholding this kind of activity. Increased competition has brought more representatives onto the field, and hospitals have simultaneously restricted the access of representatives to their physicians. Also local small meetings organised by companies have lost some of their attraction, mostly because there are too many meetings to attend, and because physicians seem to value their free time more and more in an accelerated work environment.

Like in most European countries the pharmaceutical companies in Finland have, through their organisation Pharma Industry Finland,

adapted internal rules for interactions with physicians. These rules are intended as self-protection, but also to protect physicians. These rules have grown quite restrictive, and the worldwide bad publicity that both the industry and the physicians have recently experienced will certainly provide us with even more strict rules in the future. The greatest focus will be on meetings, which should be scientific and educational. Any entertainment or excessive hospitality will be scrutinized.

In many countries, physicians' organisations have not created similar rules and guidelines, or have less restrictive rules than the industry. To defend physicians against bad publicity and governmental intervention it might be wise to re-think. The Finnish Medical Association, however, 1993 adapted some guidelines for physicians, which are published in guidelines and distributed to all physicians in Finland. These guidelines are not as detailed as those of the industry, but very much in line with them. The Association concludes that collaboration between physicians and the industry is necessary not only for the development of new drugs, but also for the education of physicians. The collaboration must, however, not interfere with the independence and professional autonomy of the physicians and common Finnish rules for hospitality must be followed. The Association underlines that the hospitality received in connection to meetings must be modest and secondary to the education. Any gift received must be inexpen-

sive and relate to the profession. These rules are also in line with the rules of the industry.

Much of the continuous education for physicians is still dependent on industrial sponsorship. That is how things have been allowed to develop over decades under the eyes of politicians. Continuous education is needed and if public money has not been available, it has been accepted from the industry. It sometimes seems peculiar that the same institutions that do not provide resources criticize physicians who accept educational grants from the industry. Last autumn a decision by Helsinki City not to allow physicians employed by the city to participate in international meetings where logistics were sponsored by a pharmaceutical company caused much debate. It remains to be seen if Helsinki can cover up. It might be that this possibility for education is no longer available, as many physicians fear.

Many hospitals in Finland have adapted a procedure where the hospital decides who should represent the hospital even when the industry pays for the logistics. It is understandable that the management of hospitals want to control the education of their physicians. It also protects the physician from unnecessary publicity. However, this rule can also take ridiculous forms. It has happened that an researcher invited to a researcher meeting for a specific clinical trial was denied participation by his manager, on the grounds that the

manager decides whom to send to the meeting!

A couple of years ago the collaboration between physicians and the industry accumulated enormous interest in Finnish media due to some legal cases where researchers had transferred money received for clinical trials performed at public hospitals to their own bank accounts. Well-known and prestigious researchers were jailed. This kind of publicity damaged much of the honest and fruitful scientific collaboration that exist between researchers and the industry. Measures were taken to make such transactions impossible, and today collaboration is strictly regulated to the benefit of the industry, the researchers and the community.

It can be estimated that, in Finland, as in the rest of the world, the future will bring even stricter guidelines regulating the collaboration between industry and the physicians. The eyes of the media follow us, and the industry will tighten the rules to protect their business. The scientific collaboration between researchers and physicians is well regulated and transparent today. In the future, focus will be on the balance between education and any kind of hospitality. To protect their own profession, it is necessary for physicians to reflect on how and for what to seek support from the industry and to draw up their own rules for how to accept hospitality.