

NFTHD #30: Guidelines for sponsoring Healthcare Professionals

In this Notes from the Help Desk, we answer a question relating to the awarding of sponsorships to healthcare professionals and what constitutes 'clear guidelines'. Specifically, a company was seeking to run a competition whereby HCPs could nominate themselves for the chance to win sponsored event attendance.

The Code does not define 'clear guidelines' but it does elaborate on some matters that should be included which are laid out in 4.4 b). Companies will vary in their approach, and they are able to determine their own policies and procedures accordingly. Either way, all companies should have a documented approach to decision-making when it comes to paying or supporting a healthcare professional, in any capacity.

As a starting point, we suggested that decision-making / guidelines could consider:

- Is the educational event they are attending credible? Does it have a formalised kind of structure with an agenda and the content to be covered?
- Is the educational event directly related to the HCP's area of expertise?
- Is the event reasonable and appropriate with respect to hospitality, travel and accommodation, therefore upholding the integrity and reputation of the industry?
- By supporting the HCP to attend the event, does this activity support the quality use of medicine?
- By supporting the HCP to attend the event, are there any expectations or conditions that we have as a result of this support? (such as participation in peer sharing events, etc)

Companies need to ensure that any such interaction with a healthcare professional, including supporting them to attend an educational event, can withstand public scrutiny.

In turning to the specific question about offering the chance to win a sponsorship (or other competitive activity), the fundamental answer to this is that the Code does not support the giving of prizes. Making it a 'prize' trivialises the relationship and any sponsorship should not involve a competitive aspect.

The IFPMA Note for Guidance on sponsorship of events and meetings also elaborates on legitimate support for HCP attendance and outlines some further considerations that might be helpful.

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