NFTHD #5a: Virtual events

As an industry, we have been hosting and sponsoring educational events for decades. With the technological shift towards virtual meetings and events, how does the Code's principles apply?

All the way back at the beginning of the covid pandemic, Medicines Australia issued "*Guidance on Conducting Virtual Meetings*" which is available in the Code Resource Toolkit. Essentially, it advises that:

- virtual meetings are permitted under the Code
- hospitality may be provided at virtual meetings, however it should be reasonable
- any information shared must be current, accurate, balanced, and scientifically valid
- all events must uphold the integrity and reputation of the industry.

We recognise that the usage of technology has increased rapidly since the beginning of 2020, and many companies have had virtual meetings and education sessions with healthcare professionals long before that.

It is appropriate for companies to provide hospitality in support of a virtual event, only where there is a staff member present at the event or in conjunction with a formal educational activity. It is not appropriate to provide hospitality to a healthcare professional in their own home or usual place of residence.

The origin of providing hospitality to healthcare professionals was compensation in return of meeting over a defined meal break (morning tea, lunch, etc) in their place of work; whereby giving up that break they would be prevented from leaving the premises to obtain any sustenance. That grew to the acceptance that any interaction with a healthcare professional required hospitality. Now, however, the dynamic has shifted where the original roadblock has been removed. A healthcare professional is not interrupting their meal break, they are not prevented from obtaining sustenance. There is no need to provide hospitality to a person in their own home.

So, while it is appropriate to provide hospitality to a healthcare professional during a virtual interaction, companies need to ensure that the delivery is appropriate.