

# NFTHD #60: Breastfeeding + the Code = Please explain

This Note from the Help Desk discusses the appropriateness of a pharma company supporting a healthcare professional (HCP) to attend an educational event, where the HCP is breastfeeding a bub. The Code has distinct parameters about not extending any support to the friends, families, guests or associates of a HCP whilst on a company-supported activity, and for good reason. So, do we take a one-size-fits-all approach and stick to our policy and procedures? Or is this a worthy cause to think outside the box?

In accordance with Code Section 4.5, accommodation should not be offered to, arranged or paid for spouses, relatives, guests or companions of a HCP. However, we suggest there could be allowances made specifically to cater for healthcare professionals who choose to balance their duties to their infants as well as to their patients. This could include having the infant to stay in the hotel room with the HCP. It could mean a family support member needs to travel with them to help out with the baby whilst the HCP attends the event. It could mean that the baby accompanies the HCP during periods of that event. It doesn't automatically extend to school aged children – it's a contextual situation that requires some common sense.

Where does one draw the line? It's about striking the balance between support and inclusivity whilst not offering something that may have an inappropriate influence on prescribing, or be perceived to be. In line with the Code, it is reasonable that the HCP covers any and all costs associated with an accompanying infant, and these not to be subsidised by company sponsorship. In one scenario put to us, a company took a more rigid approach and required that the HCP's accompanying parents who were to travel with the HCP and care for the infant were to stay in a separate hotel and take separate airport transfers. Whilst this solution may have satisfied their own company policy, the lack of proximity of the infant to the mother is going to create some challenges for breastfeeding when the infant requires. Potentially a better balance can be achieved in this case.

As we move with the times, it's also worth considering the risk of reputational damage should our policies and procedures be so rigid as to disadvantage a breastfeeding mother to attend in a professional capacity. We can take some comfort in our government's approach in 2017, allowing new mothers to breastfeed their babies on the floor of Parliament and take their infants into the chamber when needed.

## **NFTHD #60 CONTINUED...**

The Parliamentary Committee was quoted saying “Such positive and practical changes make the challenges to women serving in the Parliament a little easier to manage”, as well as believing the changes are “unlikely to have a significant impact in practice, given most members said they would prefer to keep their babies out of Parliament and only use the provision when there was no other practical option for caring for their baby”. Noting our industry is different from Parliament – but the principles at play share some common credence. Our workplace culture has matured enough to be supportive of working parents, including healthcare professionals attending an educational event directly related to their area of expertise.

In this scenario, it’s important to consider the boundary of real, likely or perceived influence. Companies should have clear guidelines for awarding such sponsorships to healthcare professionals, which can be publicly disclosed if required. Being a principles-based Code, a company is empowered to make its own ethical decisions as long as it works through the principles and risks at play. This framework allows us to use some common-sense and not be bound by rigidity as one size doesn’t always fit all scenarios. Consider the pros and cons, and from a risk perspective, take time to document your position and how you came to that. This is not only useful if a future complaint was to be made, but also good for forming your future decisions in similar circumstances. Context is always key.

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