

NFTHD #7: Engaging with Mainstream Media

In this Notes from the Help Desk, we explore how the Code guides engagement with mainstream media.

Fundamentally, the safeguard under the Therapeutic Goods Act remains in place: the promotion of prescription products to the general public is not permitted. This means that any information distributed by a Company must be non-promotional in nature - whether it is in the form of a website tile, social media asset, or a media release.

In previous editions of the Code, the only time a company could issue a product-specific media release was at the time of registration of a new product or indication, or PBS funding. Whilst the principles-based Code Edition 20 allows for more flexibility as to these circumstances, these generally remain the most usual and appropriate points in time where a company may engage with mainstream media about a prescription product – and are also outlined in the Code.

The Overarching Principle of non-promotion to the general public remains, which reflects the regulatory environment as set out in the Therapeutic Goods Act. So, whilst the Code doesn't limit media interactions to these milestones, if a company is contemplating any other circumstance to interact with mainstream media about their product, it needs to be considered very carefully, be defensible, and not transgress the non-promotional rule.

But what does that look like in practice?

- It is appropriate for Companies to issue media statements and engage with mainstream journalists - both proactively and reactively.
- This outreach needs to convey non-promotional messaging and imagery. There are recorded Code Info Sessions on the Code Resource Toolkit that explore how messaging can be considered promotional, along with examples.
- The Code guides companies as to what needs to be included in any such product-specific media statements, what should not be included, and what may be included (Section 10.1, e, f, g).
- The Code acknowledges the companies will likely release information through a number of channels, rather than limiting it only to a media statement. This multi-channel approach is appropriate if it is done in a coordinated timebound manner, and that the information is only issued once on 'channel' (i.e. 'single coordinated release across multiple channels'). Comprehensive campaigns that continually boost product related information are unlikely to be considered non-promotional.

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So, continue to cultivate those relationships with mainstream journalists and contribute to the social narrative around medicines with a general public audience. Just be considered in your approach and, above all else, engage in a non-promotional way.

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