

NFTHD #75: We know giveaways to HCPs are off-limits — but what about other audiences?

We all know that it is unethical and inappropriate to give gifts to healthcare professionals as articulated in the Code, as per Section 3b). In this Note from the Help Desk we consider if the same approach applies to non-healthcare professionals, and how do we navigate events where the audience is mixed?

Gifts and items that have the capacity to influence healthcare professionals include promotional aids and brand-name reminders. The Code Resource Toolkit has 'Guidance on Gifts, Offers & Company-branded Items' which discusses the principles behind this concept.

The Code is not explicit as to whether the same applies to non-healthcare professionals. In situations like this it's important to revisit the Code's Overarching Principles and explore how (and whether) they can be applied to help us in making an ethical decision. The Code's approach to no gift-giving stems from the inappropriate influence (or creating a perception of inappropriate influencing) of healthcare professionals and their prescribing/administration habits. This doesn't really apply to a non-healthcare professional, and there is nothing explicitly preventing gift-giving to consumers or a non-HCP audience.

What other guiding principles can we use to make an ethical decision?

- Maintaining a high reputation of our industry
- Not promoting to consumers

Bouncing around fluffy toys and stress-balls to consumers may have had their day; certainly they seem to trivialise our industry and don't serve to build confidence and trust in our industry.

The intended audience

If the event is aimed at non-HCPs and therefore the vast majority of attendees are non-HCPs (and it isn't practical to determine otherwise) then low-cost items intended for consumers could be appropriate. If the majority of the audience is, in fact, healthcare professionals, then it wouldn't be appropriate to provide give-away items, unless they may be appropriate for healthcare professionals (see Guidance). In a mixed audience, consider what kind of controls you may have to identify who is who, and how or whether give-aways are appropriate at all.

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What do we want to give away and for what purpose?

Companies undertake activities that support the quality use of medicine. Does the item promote medical education and understanding? Does it improve health outcomes or raise awareness of this? Context plays a very important role in determining what items could be provided to consumers.

In summary, revisit our Overarching Principles and as always, it is a risk-benefit exercise.

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