



Ethical promotion of medicines: Latest developments and future prospects

Ethical relationships with healthcare professionals are critical to the healthcare industry's mission to help patients by developing and marketing new medicines. Promotion of medicines, vaccines and biotech products is essential to inform healthcare professionals about new treatment options, helping them to receive appropriate training and provide the most suitable solutions for individual patients. As pharmaceutical promotion and codes of conduct continue to evolve in the ever-changing healthcare environment, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential to ensure that patients receive the best available care worldwide.

Introduction and Welcoming Remarks

Mr. Russell Williams, President, Rx&D Canada and Chair, IFPMA Code Compliance Network

The ethical promotion of medicines is essential in ensuring patients' confidence that they are receiving the treatment that is best for them. Rapidly evolving codes of ethical practice require a multi-stakeholder approach that levels the playing field for all sectors and parties involved.

Moderator

Dr Sunoor Verma, Executive Director, Geneva Health Forum

The Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring and other demonstrations of disaffection reflect a social contract under tremendous pressure. "Trust in institutions has never been so low as today". Centres of power are becoming more diffused and people are demanding more accountability and transparency. Access to health has become a rallying point, triggering action around a broader set of discontents.

H.E. Mr Juan José Gómez Camacho, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva **2**

Dr Otmar Kloiber, Secretary General, World Medical Association **3**

Mr David Brennan, President, IFPMA and Chief Executive Officer, AstraZeneca **4**

The IFPMA Code

The IFPMA Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (2006 revision) sets out standards for the ethical promotion of pharmaceutical products to healthcare professionals, to ensure that member companies' interactions with them "are appropriate and perceived as such".

Member associations are required to accept the conditions of the Code and ensure that they are incorporated in national codes. IFPMA member companies must comply with national codes where they exist and otherwise with the IFPMA Code.

The Code contains provisions relating to:

- Guiding principles (including transparency and the independence of healthcare professionals);
- The content of promotional material;
- Interactions with healthcare professionals (events, sponsorship, hospitality, gifts, etc.);
- Company procedures and responsibilities;
- Operation and enforcement.

It also includes a Q&A section to assist in interpretation of the Code and details the procedures for Code complaints.

Country perspective: promotion in Mexico

Ambassador Juan José Gómez Camacho

■ Mexico's approach to the promotion of medicines has changed dramatically in line with global changes in the perception of rights, health and the role of industry. With economic development, societies in emerging economies have become much more aware of rights and entitlements, and their governments have become more self-confident in seeking to ensure their voices are heard and their interests taken care of.

Societies are questioning the legitimacy of business interests, especially in the pharmaceutical industry — a unique business that deals literally with life and death. While the industry's interests, including profitability, are legitimate, these interests have to be balanced with the interests of society.

Within the United Nations system there has been a growing emphasis in recent years on economic and social rights — as opposed to civil and political rights — such as the rights to water, food and health. The pharmaceutical industry is producing something that is not only necessary but that people have the right to obtain. To this extent, medicines cannot be considered a “normal” commodity.

As co-Chair of the World Health Organization's Open-Ended Working Group of Member States on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, which was dealing with virus sharing and access to vaccines, Ambassador Gomez Camacho witnessed “absolute confrontation” at the start between developing country governments and industry representatives. However, in the end, after a dialogue with the industry, the two sides worked successfully

to create value for all, by serving their common interests.

In Mexico as elsewhere, economic development has been accompanied by political changes — democracy, greater awareness of rights, and more demands for transparency and accountability. A new social contract between companies, government and society needs to be forged in a way that involves transparent and accountable interaction between government officials and the private sector.

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Ambassador Juan José Gómez Camacho

Mexico and other emerging economies are moving away from a situation where business sector activities were not sufficiently regulated, and industry has also recognized the need to move. With some exceptions, pharmaceutical companies have proven to be “very receptive interlocutors”. Ambassador Gomez Camacho then stated, “With you we are on the right track”.

The Mexico City Principles

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Mexico City Principles for Voluntary Codes of Business Ethics in the Biopharmaceutical Sector were endorsed by the 2011 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO summit and recommended for adoption by all industry sectors in the 21 APEC countries. The six basic principles for companies are:

- Healthcare and patient focus means everything we do is intended to benefit patients;
- Integrity means dealing ethically, honestly and respectfully in everything we do;
- Independence means to respect the need of autonomous decision-making of all parties, free from improper influence;
- Legitimate intent means everything we do is for the right reasons, is lawful, and aligns with the spirit and the values of these Principles;
- Transparency means a general willingness to be open about our actions while respecting legitimate commercial sensitivities and intellectual property rights;
- Accountability means a willingness to be responsible for our actions and interactions.

Promotion of medicines and interaction with the pharmaceutical industry: the role of physicians and their organizations

Dr Otmar Kloiber

■ Physicians expect high-quality, efficient and affordable medicines for all people, marketed in an ethical manner. However, the paradigm of “the evil industry” is wrong. Physicians must also look at their own actions. Corruption is a matter of choice, on all sides.

Healthcare is a highly cooperative and interdisciplinary effort. All participants and contributors must be able to interact and cooperate, including industry and healthcare professionals. Coalitions to fight for common interests are a legitimate right in a free society. However, they should focus on delivering the best possible healthcare to patients.

“Health is a matter of trust; health professionals must put the best interest of patients first.”

Dr Otmar Kloiber

Health is a matter of trust; health professionals must put the best interest of patients first. This trust requires responsibility, professionalism, quality, safety, confidentiality, privacy and accountability. It also requires transparency, especially when interests are or might be in conflict.

Healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical industry have to “get along”; they must work together in order to provide quality healthcare. This requires codes of ethics, such as the WMA’s International Code of Medical Ethics and its Declarations of Geneva and Helsinki; agreements such as industry codes of practice; and penal codes to deal with criminal activities such as corruption and bribery. Independence and transparency are the two basic principles of WMA policy, as contained in its Statement concerning the Relationship between Physicians and Commercial Enterprises.

There is more to be done in defining the relationship between physicians and industry. While all partners in healthcare must be able to cooperate, clinical independence and professional autonomy must be preserved. The best protection is to ensure that there are “no payments in private pockets”. Transparency on all financial ties allows independent judgment and preserves trust.

■ http://www.ifpma.org/fileadmin/content/Events/Pharma_Forum/1_December_2011/111202_Geneva_Pharma_Forum_Kloiber.pdf

WMA Statement Concerning the Relationship between Physicians and Commercial Enterprises

This Statement was adopted in 2004 and amended in October 2009 by the 60th WMA General Assembly, New Delhi, India. The preamble includes the following:

- “The combination of financial resources and product knowledge contributed by industry and the medical knowledge possessed by physicians enables the development of new diagnostic procedures, drugs, therapies, and treatments and can lead to great advances in medicine.”
- “However, [...] commercial considerations can affect the physician’s objectivity, especially if the physician is in any way dependent on the enterprise.”
- “Guidelines [for relationships between physicians and industry] must incorporate the key principles of disclosure, avoidance of obvious conflicts of interest and the physician’s clinical autonomy to act in the best interests of patients.”

■ http://www.ifpma.org/fileadmin/content/Events/Pharma_Forum/1_December_2011/WMA_Statement_concerning_the_Relationship_between_Physicians_and_Commercial_Enterprises.pdf

Ongoing commitment to ethical promotion and latest developments

Mr David Brennan

■ The difficult economic outlook coincides with a period of major social and political change in many countries, as well as rapid and far-reaching technological developments. All of these have an impact on healthcare needs and how these needs are met. Although the pharmaceutical industry can and does play a positive role, “we’re not perceived as the good guys”. The industry came near the bottom of the list in a 2010 Harris poll that asked people to rank industries for honesty and trustworthiness, below even the banks. While it is easy to dismiss these as perceptions rather than reality, the industry can, by setting the highest standards, help to turn those perceptions around.

It is not enough to have a box-ticking culture. For its part, AstraZeneca is working hard to send a message to all its 60,000 employees that they should “do the right thing”. “Our aim is to avoid anything that could be perceived as an inappropriate inducement to a healthcare professional”. This is not easy, especially for the sales force; they will certainly encounter people who will ask for gifts or threaten to take their business elsewhere. “But we have made it clear that our sales force have to say no. They must do the right thing, not the easy thing”.

Similarly, the IFPMA Code has already had an impact in gaining trust and restoring the industry’s reputation. It has led national associations to examine their own codes and raise standards, for example in Mexico and South Africa. But the world has changed since 2006 when the IFPMA Code was last revised. The scope of the Code needs to be extended beyond marketing to cover all promotion practices and interactions with healthcare professionals and patient organizations.

“It is vital that our industry shows how it can, and does, play a positive role in meeting the healthcare challenges we face. We can, and should, be a force for good” Mr David Brennan

The industry faces many challenges, related to the costs of healthcare, the drug pipeline and patent expiration, as well as its reputation. While many of the changes in the external environment are outside its control, there are things that can be done. “Central to that is working to improve our reputation. So it is vital that our industry shows how it can, and does, play a positive role in meeting the healthcare challenges we face. We can, and should, be a force for good, and that we give the highest priority to showing our external stakeholders that they can trust us to do the right thing.”

Discussion

Among the topics raised in discussion were:

- The respective roles of self-regulation and government regulation;
- The importance of constructive dialogue between industry, governments and other stakeholders, including healthcare professionals and patient organizations;
- The need to promote “cultural change” in relation to ethical promotion of medicines, not only within the pharmaceutical industry but also among health professionals.



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About the IFPMA

IFPMA represents the research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations across the globe. The research-based pharmaceutical industry’s 1.3 million employees research, develop and provide medicines and vaccines that improve the life of patients worldwide. Based in Geneva, IFPMA has official relations with the United Nations and contributes industry expertise to help the global health community find solutions that improve global health.

IFPMA manages global initiatives including: IFPMA Developing World Health Partnerships studies and identifies trends for the research-based pharmaceutical industry’s long-term partnership programs to improve health in developing countries, IFPMA Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices sets standards for ethical promotion of medicines, IFPMA Clinical Trials Portal helps patients and health professionals find out about on-going clinical trials and trial results.

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