

Pharma industry updates advice on engaging with healthcare professionals as countries emerge from COVID-19 lockdown

Geneva, 28 May 2020: As countries lift lockdown restrictions, the international pharma industry body, IFPMA, provides its members with [ethical considerations](#) on when and how to resume in-person meetings with healthcare practitioners and other stakeholders within the healthcare system.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, biopharmaceutical companies proactively interrupted face-to-face interactions between their representatives and physicians, in order to protect patients, healthcare professionals, and their own employees, and have replaced in-office visits and face-to-face congresses with online platforms, virtual meetings, webinars, etc.

Maintaining dialogue and scientific exchange with the medical community is critical to inform physicians about new possible treatments, alternative treatment protocols, product supply or safety/efficacy data. This meaningful engagement is even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, as physicians contend with the many medical questions of how the virus could affect their patients' existing treatments and at the same time need to remain informed about general scientific information and treatment options. *"During the lockdown, employees have stepped away from healthcare sites to limit the spread of the virus and protect patients, while maintaining remote interactions to continue to share scientific knowledge"* explains Rady Johnson, Chair of the IFPMA Ethics and Business Integrity Committee, and Chief Compliance, Quality and Risk Officer at Pfizer. Looking to the future, he adds: *"Maintaining productive dialogue and scientific exchange with the medical community is central to ensuring that all patients, COVID and non-COVID, receive the treatments needed to support their overall health and well-being. But even as doors open up, we want to preserve that dialogue and partnership without risk to the safety of patients, customers, our employees and communities. We remain committed to appropriately engaging healthcare professionals in-person when it is safe to do so, alongside our continued use of remote interaction channels"*.

In these unprecedented times and the high level of unpredictability, the biopharmaceutical industry has found that its recently launched [Ethos](#)¹ has been indispensable in helping provide the necessary framework to anchor ethical decision-making, where no specific rules could have previously been anticipated. This principles-driven approach will continue to guide IFPMA members' conduct as they adapt to the evolving COVID-19 operating environment.

Going forward, through an ongoing dialogue with its external stakeholders, IFPMA is intending to provide additional guidance on what the "new normal" for engagements with healthcare professionals will look like.

Dr Catherine Duggan, CEO of the International Pharmaceutical Federation said: *"FIP welcomes this timely document to support our pharmaceutical industry colleagues in appropriate engagement amid new environments presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This framework helps to address the professional sensitivities and thus strengthens the collaboration opportunities with the industry partners. This [guidance](#) on how to resume in-person interactions for the purpose of engagement and scientific exchange shows consideration for the needs of healthcare professionals during this challenging time. This is very timely guidance in the times of a global pandemic with unprecedented impact"*.

¹ Our [Ethos](#) is the foundation that shapes how the R&D based biopharmaceutical industry sustains trust based on the core values of care, fairness, respect and honesty.

Dr Otmar Kloiber, Secretary General of the World Medical Association (WMA) said: *“We expect from the pharma industry to carefully seek with all of us a “new normal”. This does include respect for the still increased workload of many health professionals, the strict requirements for protection, especially hygiene and distancing, virtual communication wherever possible and the engagement for an ecological way of recovery.”*

Thomas Cueni, Director General of IFPMA added: *“From the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic, industry has been [united in its response](#), acting with urgency and integrity. Society needs to know it can count on the biopharmaceutical industry. We have a responsibility to work tirelessly and rapidly to tap into the industry’s innovation capabilities to bring solutions. This has resulted in hundreds of potential therapies, vaccines and diagnostics to contain and end COVID-19 being developed at unimaginable speed. At the same time, companies have managed to maintain a steady supply of vital medicines and vaccines for patients with other life-threatening diseases”.*

Kawal dip Sehmi, CEO, International Alliance of Patients' Organisations (IAPO) said: *“Dr Margaret Chan, the previous WHO Director General, once said that any new disease that is emerging faster than our understanding is never under control. IAPO believes that in order to control the COVID-19 pandemic, which is now a runaway disease, we need to quickly improve the understanding of our frontline workers by giving them the best information that is accurate, timely and relevant in a fast changing health ecosystem. Pharma, especially those engaged with COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccination development, is that first-hand source of information. Ethically the time is right to consider resuming in-person interactions with healthcare professionals is now as we need to control the infodemic and provide that first-hand information”.*

For more information, please see:

- [Ethical Considerations for Resuming In-Person Interactions with Healthcare Professionals Post COVID-19: A Guidance Document](#)
- [IFPMA Ethos](#)
- [IFPMA Code of Practice 2019](#)
- [IFPMA COVID-19 Information Hub](#)
- [The value of the Ethos in the context of COVID-19](#) (Video by Rady Johnson, Chair of the IFPMA Ethics and Business Integrity Committee, and Chief Compliance, Quality and Risk Officer at Pfizer)
- [Global Biopharmaceutical Industry Commitment to Address Coronavirus Public Health Crisis](#)
- [COVID-19 Biopharmaceutical Industry – Regulatory Guiding Principles](#)

About IFPMA

IFPMA represents the research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations across the globe. The research-based pharmaceutical industry’s 2 million employees discover, develop, and deliver 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.



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