

Ethical sponsorship boosts learning and will benefit all

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The radical shift in service provision brought in by *Payment by Results* (King's Fund, 2005) has resulted in an equally radical shift in the NHS' relationship with the commercial sector. This change has prompted a review of accountability to ensure that both healthcare professionals and commercial companies act ethically according to a code of professional conduct (NMC, 2007).

Smith & Nephew is committed to ethical trading and it follows the code of practice of the Surgical Dressings Manufacturer's Association (SDMA) of which it is a founder member. This code allows industry to 'learn what is and is not considered acceptable practice when working with healthcare professionals' (SDMA, 2007).

Changing the culture and the ways of working within the clinical and commercial domains of healthcare is necessary to ensure that a healthy working environment is created where innovation of technically advanced wound care products and concepts can develop in a truly ethical manner (SDMA, 2007). With this goal in mind, the principles that address business courtesies, training and education and company-sponsored attendance at conferences and events needs to be explicit and should be adhered to by all concerned.

Principle 3.2 of the SDMA code of practice, is concerned with business courtesies and Principle 3.8 covers conferences, exhibitions and seminars. The passage that stands out is that companies

can underwrite the costs of social events at a conference but the hospitality and social aspect should be modest and 'secondary to the event, related to a legitimate purpose and in proportion to the educational element of the event'. This is reiterated in the pan-European code of practice established by the European Medical Technology Industry Association's guidelines for corporate hospitality (EUCOMED, 2006). It also states that product education and training for healthcare professionals is essential to facilitate safe and effective use of the medical technology available.

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The Wounds UK annual conference is the UK's largest national wound care event of its type. The programme is tailor-made to meet the educational needs of UK nurses who are involved in wound care. In addition the event gives the opportunity to identify the benefits of collaborative working between the NHS and the commercial sector. Before the 2006 conference, Smith & Nephew decided to inform the healthcare professionals that it had invited to the conference of its intention to adhere to the SDMA code and that hospitality would be secondary to education and training. This bold approach was appreciated and respected by our customers. By setting clear boundaries at the outset of the event it ensured that everyone was well aware of their responsibilities and professional

and personal expectations and it allowed us all to focus on the main purpose of the event — to encourage interprofessional communication with the exchange of sound evidence-based practice, a goal which has considerable support (Casteldine, 2006).

There has often been an assumption that the hospitality and social aspect of health conferences may overshadow and detract from the educational aspects. It is not the hospitality that should be brought into question, but its scale and the importance that is placed on it. The educational and learning aspect of conferences and events needs to be the foremost attraction for those attending such an event and who accept invitations from commercial companies.

There is no doubt that the working environment in the NHS has changed over the past few years and that this will continue for some time. What is important is that a professional standard of conduct is set and that it is adhered to by all parties. This will be for the benefit of the NHS and ultimately for the benefit of the patient. **WUK**

References

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