

SAPI Guidelines on Sponsorships, Gifts and Hospitality

By SAPI Marketing Practices Committee



This is the second in a series of articles on the revised **SAPI** (Singapore Association of Pharmaceutical Industries) **Code of Marketing Practices**. The first article appeared in the October 2004 issue of SMA News and provided an overview of the key recent revisions to the Code. The next few articles will elaborate on specific sections of the Code, which bear greater relevance to physician-pharmaceutical company interactions, starting with this article on **"Sponsorships, Gifts and Hospitality"**.

INTRODUCTION

The SAPI Code of Marketing Practices is a set of ethical standards for local pharmaceutical companies. Its objective is to provide guidance for proper conduct in the marketing and promotion of medicinal products, and to serve as the basis for self-discipline within the local pharmaceutical industry.

SPONSORSHIPS

Section 5, entitled "Symposia, congresses and other means of verbal communication", provides industry guidance in the area of sponsorship.

Sponsorship to Overseas Medical Meetings

SAPI recognises that symposia, congresses and medical meetings are important for the dissemination of current medical knowledge and experience. Provisions of sponsorship to physicians to attend overseas meetings are allowed as long as scientific objectives remain the principal focus of such overseas trips.

Such overseas medical meetings must have participants from two or more different countries (excluding the country of origin of the speakers/presenters). If the majority of the participants are local physicians, the event should be held in Singapore.

Any support to individual physicians to participate should not be conditional upon any obligation to promote any products.

Transparency of Sponsorship

The fact of sponsorship by a company should be clearly stated. The sponsorship must be able to withstand public and professional scrutiny and conform to the professional standards of ethics and good taste.

Are Post-Meeting Entertainment Programmes Allowed?

The scientific programme should always be the main focus and attraction of such overseas meetings. Entertainment or other hospitality and any gifts offered should be secondary to the main purpose of the meeting, and should be kept to a moderate level.

As a general rule, scientific content must be at least 75% of the total programme time.

Air ticket – Business or Economy Class?

Pharmaceutical companies are to provide only Economy class tickets for air travel of less than 6 hours.

Can Doctors be Accompanied by their Spouses?

Companies should not pay travel costs of persons accompanying invited members of the medical and allied professions. Hospitality also should not extend beyond members of the profession.

Invitations to meetings should not be extended to spouses unless they themselves are practising members of the medical or allied professions.

GIFTS & HOSPITALITY

Section 6, entitled "Hospitality and Promotional Items", provides industry guidance in the areas of gifts and hospitality.

Nature & Value Limit of Gifts

Promotional items of nominal value (not exceeding \$100 per unit) are permissible as long as they are related to the physician's work and/or entail a benefit to patients.

Gifts should not be contingent on increased prescribing. No gifts or financial inducement shall be offered or given to members of the medical and allied professions for the purpose of sales promotion.

Are Educational Gifts such as Medical Textbooks Allowed?

Text or reference books/information, and other educational materials, may be given to physicians if they serve a genuine educational function.

Are Donations for New Clinic Openings or Renovations Allowed?

Such donations, especially to individual physicians or group practices, are strongly discouraged as they may be perceived as a form of financial incentive, and may not be able to withstand professional and public scrutiny.

What Level of Hospitality is Considered Excessive?

Inappropriate financial or material benefits, including inappropriate hospitality, should not be offered to physicians to influence them in the prescribing of products.

Hospitality during symposia, congresses and medical meetings should be appropriate and not out of proportion to the occasion. Its cost should not exceed that level which the majority of recipients might normally adopt when paying for themselves.

The level of hospitality must be able to withstand public and professional scrutiny and conform to the professional standards of ethics and good taste.

Are Lucky Draws allowed at Medical Meetings?

Lotteries/lucky draws, and other games that are based purely on chance (with no effort involved), should not be part of the medical symposia/exhibitions. ■

**For more information on the SAPI Code, visit the SAPI website at <http://www.sapi.org.sg>
Physicians can also request for a free copy of the Code from the SAPI Secretariat at Tel: 6738 0966.**