

A better Code of Conduct

Russell Williams

In November 2004, Canada's Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D) made substantial changes to the industry's *Code of Conduct*. Although these changes might not have pleased both the medical and pharmaceutical communities, they were necessary.

The original *Code of Conduct* was first introduced in 1988 and reflected the approach to and expectations of relationships between industry and the medical community at that time. The *Code of Conduct* is a living document and has undergone several improvements over the years. Changes then, like the most recent changes, responded to the business climate of the day, reflected and upheld a high standard of ethics between the two communities, and ensured that professional relationships resulted in the very best outcome for patients.

As an integral part of Canada's health care system, innovation and research and development of new medicines is key to improving quality of life for patients, treating and relieving symptoms of illness, and in many cases curing disease. Family physicians are on the front lines every day. Their interaction with industry, whether in prescribing medicines for patients or spending time with pharmaceutical representatives, is part and parcel of these professional relationships.

These relationships and public expectations of these relationships led to the latest changes to the *Code of Conduct*. To address industry's access to physicians, parameters were needed that would stand up to public scrutiny and would clarify professional interactions between physicians and industry in two areas: hospitality and donations.

Hospitality (business and entertainment)

A new section on hospitality (7B1.2) took effect January 1, 2005. This section states that refreshments and meals provided to health care

professionals are to be "modest in content and cost." The *Code of Conduct* reads as follows: "[I]n all instances refreshments and/or meals must be clearly incidental. No other form of hospitality or entertainment is to be provided."

Member companies are sending a strong message with this change: there is a well-defined line demarcating ethical business practices with health care professionals.



Donations (charities)

Also effective since January 1, 2005, is the new Section 6.1.2, which states:

Where companies provide financial support to a charity and/or non profit organization through such avenues as the purchase of a table or tables at a dinner or other social event, or through the purchase of a foursome or foursomes at a golf tournament, or similar activity, individuals invited to sit at the corporate table(s), or to play golf as part of the foursome, should not be healthcare professionals.

This new section is not intended to reduce or eliminate the substantial support member companies provide to various charities but to eliminate the possibility that such invitations would be perceived to extend to health care professionals solely for the purpose of gaining access to them.

Canadian Medical Association support

Research-based pharmaceutical companies are pleased to have the support of the Canadian Medical Association on these most recent

amendments to the *Code of Conduct*. President Dr Albert Schumacher has stated these changes “are consistent” with the CMA’s policy. Dr Schumacher also moved the yardstick further when he said he looks forward to further discussions with Rx&D “aimed at improving harmonization between our policies.”

These will not be the last changes to the *Code of Conduct*. Perfection might not be achievable, but excellence is. The amendments described above reflect a vision of appropriate industry-physician interaction and respond to evolving approaches, attitudes, ethics, expectations, and perceptions by industry, the medical community, and the Canadian population at large.

benefit our patients, our health care system, and our economic well-being.

A copy of the Rx&D *Code of Conduct* can be accessed and printed from the association’s website (www.canadapharma.org). Click on “Industry Publications” and then click on “Code of Conduct.”

Mr Williams is the President of Canada’s Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D). Before his appointment as President, he had been a member of the Quebec National Assembly for nearly 15 years.



Innovation and the Code of Conduct

The Rx&D *Code of Conduct* is also integral to the industry’s innovation agenda. We strongly believe that Canadian patients have the right to better access to new medicines. New medicines can be developed only when investment encourages and supports increased pharmaceutical research and development.

The latest amendments to the *Code of Conduct* demonstrate to health care stakeholders and policy makers alike that industry and the medical community can work together without the perception of unwarranted influence, thus paving the way for better pharmaceutical innovations that will