



RACP
Specialists. Together
EDUCATE ADVOCATE INNOVATE

FAQs



Ethical relationships between
health professionals and **industry**

2. Speaking at a pharmaceutical company sponsored event

I've been asked to speak at a pharmaceutical company sponsored event. How should I manage this?

What questions should I ask before agreeing to speak?

The decision about whether to accept this invitation will depend on the purpose of the event and the degree of control that the company has over its organisation and delivery. Before agreeing to speak at a company sponsored event, you should consider the following questions:

- Where has the invitation come from? What is the purpose of the meeting and who is organising it?
- What role does the company have in setting the meeting agenda, selecting speakers and determining the content of talks?
- Is there an explicit or implicit link with a single company or product?
- Will there be other forms of industry interaction (e.g., exhibits, trade stalls, gifts, entertainment)? Will the scientific and promotional components of the meeting be sufficiently separated by the organisers?
- Have the criteria used to select invited speakers and delegates been publicly disclosed?
- Will I be paid to speak at the event?
- Will presenting at the event be likely to result in any actual or perceived loss of professional independence?
- Does the sponsoring company's organisational history and practices raise any concerns?

In general, industry support of meetings should be indirect and mediated through independent organisers, untied to the promotion of any commercial product or other industry concern, and appropriately disclosed to relevant organisations and meeting attendees.

What are the risks and benefits of participating in such events?

Attendance of meetings, industry sponsored or otherwise, provide opportunities for learning, networking and career development. Any event organised or sponsored by a pharmaceutical company could, however, be a marketing opportunity and carries a risk of influencing the capacities of clinical practitioners to make disinterested decisions on behalf of their patients. Another risk is real or perceived conflict of interest stemming from your relationship with the sponsor and their product (even if you do not speak specifically about this product). It might also erode public and professional perception of your objectivity, integrity and professional judgement.

Could accepting this invitation influence my practice?

The evidence shows that physicians who attend sponsored events are more likely to prescribe the sponsor's product and request its inclusion on hospital formularies.

Does it matter what perception is created if I accept this invitation?

Yes, this could result in the loss of trust by patients, your peers, government and the wider community and undermine the assumption of independence of health professionals from industry and therefore the trust on which clinical relationships depend.

Is there some way I could present at this event and not align myself with the drug company?

This depends on the organisation and purpose of the event and your role in it. A degree of real or perceived alignment is inevitable if a meeting is organised by a single company, whether or not you personally speak about the company or its product. You can, however, minimise perceived alignment by, for example, not accepting payment for your travel expenses or participation, basing your presentation on best evidence, using your own slides, referring to therapies by their generic names, and making clear declarations of any other relationships you have with industry.

Does the purpose of the meeting make a difference (e.g. educational, promotional, etc)?

Any event organised or sponsored by a pharmaceutical company, even if it is labelled as "educational", is also a promotional opportunity and carries a risk of impacting on the capacities of clinical practitioners to make disinterested decisions on behalf of their patients. That said, you should be particularly cautious about meetings that have no or limited educational value and are clearly directed at product promotion or familiarisation.

Should I accept an offer of payment, funding or reimbursement for the event?

Reimbursement for expenses might be appropriate but you should not accept payment beyond this. If there is more than one sponsoring company, their payments should be pooled and distributed to speakers by the conference organisers. These measures reduce (but do not eliminate) the real or perceived conflict of interest associated with accepting payment from industry.

Does it make a difference whether there is an explicit or implicit link between the event and the drug company's product?

In general, it is not appropriate for health professionals to be involved in promotional meetings on behalf of industry (i.e., those with an explicit link to the drug company's products). You should also bear in mind that a meeting sponsored by industry may also have an implicit link with its products and may still contain elements of promotion.

Should I participate if the content is controlled or influenced by the sponsor?

The information you present should be based on the evidence and not be influenced or controlled by the sponsor.

Should I agree to use the company's slides?

No. Using the company's slides will create doubt as to your impartiality as a health professional and the unbiased nature of the information you present at the event.

Would I need to report this activity? If so, where and to whom?

The nature of industry support, and any obligations associated with it, should be declared openly in relevant circumstances (e.g., to professional bodies, employers, committees, students, on research articles and in relevant clinical situations).

You should make sure that any industry support used by the meeting organising committee to pay clinicians for their contributions will be disclosed and placed in the public domain prior to the meeting.

You should also be aware that, in Australia, the Medicines Australia Code of Conduct requires companies to publicly report when a company pays a healthcare professional for their service or provides financial support for them.



For more information visit
www.racp.edu.au

Australia

145 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: +61 2 9256 5444
1300 697 227

New Zealand

4th Floor, 99 The Terrace
Wellington 6011

PO Box 10601
Wellington 6143
Phone: +64 4 472 6713
0508 697 227



RACP
Specialists. Together