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FAQs



Ethical relationships between
health professionals and **industry**

6. Invitation to be a member of a pharmaceutical company advisory board

I have been invited to be a member of a pharmaceutical company advisory board. Should I accept the offer?

What are the risks and benefits of taking on such a role?

The main benefit of advisory board membership is that it provides the opportunity to use your clinical knowledge to increase the likelihood that the company's research, therapeutic and other practices meet the needs of patients and communities.

At the same time, however, membership of an advisory board may encourage feelings of commitment to the organisation, its employees and its products and lead to (conscious or unconscious) privileging of the company's interests over those of patients. Other risks associated with accepting membership of an advisory board is that it could impact on your clinical judgment and patient care and erode public and professional perception of your objectivity, integrity and professional judgement.

Does it make a difference if the role is unpaid?

While payment might exacerbate the sense of reciprocity, this sense exists whether or not the role is paid. Judgment and decision-making might, therefore, be affected irrespective of whether the advisory role is paid or unpaid. Similarly, while colleagues and the public are likely to attach more significance to a paid role, they might also be suspicious of doctors who have unpaid roles in pharmaceutical companies.

Can I accept funding (e.g., for research) from a company for which I am an advisory board member?

This is permissible, however, you should be alert to the heightened risk that you will be influenced by the company and will have to manage competing loyalties stemming from your advisory board membership and the relationships it has created. You will need to ensure that robust strategies are put in place to ensure the transparency and probity of any activities that are funded by the company.

What strategies can I use to accept membership of a pharmaceutical company advisory board in a manner that is ethically and professionally justifiable?

Prior to your appointment, you can ensure that the company adheres to industry-wide governance standards (e.g., Medicines Australia Code of Conduct and Medicines New Zealand Code of Practice). You should also ensure that advisory board procedures are satisfactory, this includes making sure there are formal, defined terms of reference, agendas for each meeting, procedures for declaring and managing conflicts of interest, and that minutes are recorded and approved in accordance with usual practices. You should also be satisfied that your involvement is meaningful, rather than purely symbolic.

Do I need to declare the membership and if so, in what circumstances and to whom?

You should openly declare your membership on a pharmaceutical company's advisory board as it poses questions of dualities of interest. This may be especially appropriate when making presentations at meetings relevant to a company or its products, when teaching and training, when consulting with patients, in meetings and discussions in institutions, when prescribing in

circumstances where questions might be raised about the independence of clinical decisions, and when submitting proposals for approval to a Human Research Ethics Committee when company products are involved.



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