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Paediatricians oppose formula industry funding of paediatric association Letter in leading medical journal highlights conflict of interest

In a letter in today's medical journal The Lancet, senior British paediatricians support WHO officials in their criticism of recent decisions by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) to accept funding from manufacturers of breast milk substitutes.

Writing in the Lancet on Feb 11th, the Director of Maternal, Adolescent, Child and Newborn Health at WHO, Dr Anthony Costello, together with 4 colleagues charged that the acceptance of such funding by the RCPCH 'contravened the spirit and aim of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk substitutes .. and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions'. This creates a conflict of interest which the authors suggest breaches WHO guidance.

Waterston and colleagues write in today's Lancet as sponsors of a motion at last year's annual RCPCH meeting which opposed industry funding and was supported by a majority of delegates present. The authors ask the RCPCH to change its policy in line with the motion passed at last year's AGM.

Says Dr Tony Waterston, one of the letter's authors and a Fellow of the RCPCH:
We members of the RCPCH expect our College as a world leader to provide unbiased advice on breastfeeding and young child feeding. Unfortunately the acceptance of baby food industry funding compromises its ability to do so. This will also undermine paediatricians around the world in their efforts to support breastfeeding in both low income and high income countries. We are pleased to see a temporary halt of funding to specified breastmilk substitute manufacturers and ask that the College permanently excludes all such companies as potential sponsors as soon as possible.

<http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news/rcpch-and-commercial-organisations>

Information for editors:

The World Health Organisation International Code of Marketing of Breast milk substitutes http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf and relevant resolutions from the World Health Assembly prohibit the acceptance by health workers of financial or material inducements (including contributions to fellowships and research grants for health workers, as well as contributions toward their participation in study tours or attendance at professional conferences) and call for avoidance of conflicts of interests. Further, recommendation 6 of the Guidance unequivocally states "...health professional associations should not...accept equipment or services from companies that market foods for infants and young children, accept gifts or incentives from such companies" or "allow such companies to sponsor meetings of health professionals and scientific meetings".

The RCPCH has stated its acceptance of the International Code and relevant WHA

resolutions and its support for breastfeeding.

Infant formula manufacturers are encouraged to provide stands at the RCPCH annual meeting to promote their products, though in future the four companies mentioned in the RCPCH due diligence policy cited above will be excluded. The Feb 11th WHO letter and today's letter are attached.

Dr Waterston is available for interview at 07763385319