

Guidelines on working with Funders and Sponsors

The Royal College of General Practitioners

1. Introduction

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the academic organisation and registered charity in the UK for general practitioners. Its aim is to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the 'voice' of general practitioners on education, training and standards issues. RCGP relies on its reputation for independence, impartiality and a commitment to the highest standards of patient care. RCGP recognizes that accepting funding from pharmaceutical companies is something that needs to be approached with caution.

The purpose of this document is to provide clear guidance on how RCGP should work with the pharmaceutical and other industries in the best interests of the College. It sets out the principles on which decisions about funding opportunities should be based although RCGP will look at each relationship individually.

Sponsorship is defined as funding from any external source, including funding for all or part of the costs of a member of staff, research, training, equipment, meeting rooms, costs associated with meetings, meals, gifts, hospitality, accommodation and transport costs and provision of free services (speakers), buildings or premises.

This guidance applies to ALL College activities and meetings including those of departments across the Directorates, Faculties, Devolved Councils, Clinical Networks, Projects, any networks facilitated by the College and any sub-groups thereof.

2. Context

RCGP works with a wide range of pharmaceutical companies with an interest in primary care, whilst always maintaining its independence. We believe it is important to maintain co-operative relationships with companies that manufacture, provide and market products and services for use within or applicable to the field of primary care. We maintain relationships with a wide range of companies and are not reliant on a single one.

- 2.1 It is imperative that the high quality information provided by RCGP to our membership is not influenced in any way by acceptance of pharmaceutical sponsorship. The College will withdraw from any initiative that risks jeopardising this independent stance.

- 2.2 RCGP will not embark on, or continue with, any sponsorship arrangement or collaborative venture which might damage its reputation.
- 2.3 We comply with recommendations made in the COMA report and do not accept any advertisements relating to bottle feeding, 'formula' baby milks and foods for babies under six months old.
- 2.4 RCGP will not knowingly accept money from companies whose activities include the manufacture of arms, alcohol or tobacco on ethical grounds and this includes related charitable trusts.**
- 2.5 RCGP reserves the right to refuse any promotion/sponsorship arrangement which it feels would not be in keeping with the College's position as a registered Charity seeking to improve the quality of general practice medicine. External organizations securing sponsorship on our behalf must seek approval from the College prior to an offer being confirmed.

Difficulties have arisen in connection with services such as acupuncture, herbal remedies and food substances. The general principle is that the RCGP is unlikely to accept advertisements for medical or paramedical services for which there is little scientific evidence of effectiveness. Research trials and evidence will be required.

3. Principles for Partnership

The guidelines that follow are based on the following core principles:

- Integrity and openness
- Maintenance of independence
- Equality in partnership
- Mutual benefit for all parties
- Promoting excellence in family medicine worldwide

4. Relationships between RCGP and the pharmaceutical industry

- 4.1 Relationships between RCGP and individual pharmaceutical companies can and should be based upon a principle of partnership working
- 4.2 Each party should recognise that successful partnerships are those where both partners benefit, and each should seek to understand the internal culture of, and external pressures on, the other.
- 4.3 RCGP will not enter into a relationship designed to give one company obvious competitive advantage over another, and where possible we favour the use of funding consortia based on two or more companies working together. However, the College will enter into strategic partnerships with individual companies if these match our corporate objectives.
- 4.4 RCGP accepts financial support from pharmaceutical companies and groups of companies on the following conditions:

- There are strong grounds for believing it will result in benefit to RCGP members and primary care patients.
- The College is satisfied that accepting such support does not adversely affect the independent status/reputation of the organization.
- The College believes that accepting such support falls within the guidelines of the Charity Commission
- There is no attempt on the part of the company of companies to influence RCGP policy or actions explicitly or implicitly.

Initial approaches to or from potential sponsors, including commercial, biomedical companies or other organisations, should be referred to the the Head of Fundraising & Sponsorship.

Any officers and staff with personal contacts within commercial or potential partnership organisations should let the Head of Fundraising & Sponsorship know in the first instance in order to discuss potential suitable projects and tie-ins. (Note: individuals will be asked to declare any interest in the aforementioned organisations).

Any queries about whether to accept or secure sponsorship from a company, should be referred to the Director of Policy and Communications, in the first instance. This applies to all activities within the College including Devolved Councils and Faculties, particularly for amounts over £500.

5. Guidelines for working together

- 5.1 RCGP will retain full editorial control over all publications and printed materials sponsored by a pharmaceutical company or companies and will maintain copyright.
- 5.2 RCGP must be consulted wherever and whenever its name is used, for both internal and external communications. Approval from the Director of Policy and Communications or their designated deputy must be sought for any copy produced which refers to a RCGP initiative supported by a pharmaceutical company.
- 5.3 RCGP's logo must not be used by companies without written approval beforehand from the College.(please refer all enquiries to the Director of Policy and Communications in the first instance).
- 5.4 Press releases must not be issued by external organisations which refer to RCGP without the College's prior approval. Suggested quotes may be drafted but must not be used without agreement from either RCGP's Chief Executive/ Director of Policy and Communications or their designated deputy.
- 5.5 When working on a joint initiative the College would prefer to work with a single point of contact within the company concerned to liaise with a named contact at RCGP. There will be occasions when discussions involve more than one party within either the College or the Company but all negotiations should be communicated back to the Head of Fundraising and Sponsorship at the College and the named individual within the Company.

- 5.6 RCGP is happy to work with PR, advertising and marketing agencies employed by pharmaceutical companies once a joint project is underway. However, during the planning stage of such a project, RCGP requires a representative from the company to be present as well as the agency.
- 5.7 Written agreements will be produced for each joint initiative between RCGP and a pharmaceutical company, and formal contracts will be produced where required by law.
- 5.8 A company's support will be acknowledged appropriately following discussions with the company concerned.
- 5.9 RCGP will keep companies regularly informed of the progress of the initiative they are supporting and can expect a minimum of an annual report.
- 5.10 Monies must be paid within the agreed time frame or any agreements will become null and void.

6. Product endorsement

- 6.1 RCGP does not endorse individual products, treatments and/or medical devices, of whatever kind, because we believe that patients need the widest possible range of treatment options. The College will not put itself in a position where it might be perceived to be endorsing or supporting a particular product.

7. For members of the ABPI

For member companies of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) such partnership arrangements should comply with the ABPI Code of Practice.

Where partnerships involve the pharmaceutical industry and related commercial sector then the proposed arrangement must comply with the Medicines (Advertising) Regulations 1994.

The Policy and Communications department will be responsible for the maintenance of all information relating to partnerships with pharmaceuticals and all other commercial sponsors.

Notes

The definition of a partnership does not apply to:

Personal gifts of less than £25 per gift e.g. gifts of post-it pads, pens etc. However gifts should be declared if several small gifts worth a total of £100 are received from the same or closely related source in a 12 month period. (Note- the ABPI Code of Practice (5) permits the provision of a promotional aid, which costs the donor company no more than £6 plus VAT).

Meetings

Where there is involvement of any company working within the Healthcare sector in the funding of a meeting at any level it is unacceptable for the speakers/presenters to be chosen solely by the company. The chairman/organiser must ensure that they have complete freedom to select or reject any suggested participant, particularly if there is any likelihood that names may have been selected because of their known partiality towards the company or product. Sponsorship of meetings should be declared prominently at the outset.

Anything else on sponsorship of meetings – a promotional stand outside the meeting room, gifts must be inexpensive and relevant, hospitality must be secondary to the purpose of the meeting.

Conclusion

The RCGP relies on its reputation for independence, impartiality and a commitment to the highest standards of patient care. RCGP recognises that accepting funding from pharmaceutical and other companies is something that needs to be approached with caution.

Not all relationships may be wholly positive for the College and it is important that we recognise this, but equally the vast majority of commercial partners will bring positive benefits. The crucial factor in the decision making process will be the integrity of the College and our reputation – at a national, devolved council or faculty level, we are all working towards the same goal.