Transparency in drug industry relationships

In this article...
- Development of a database to record relationships between healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical companies
- How information for the database is collected and disclosed

From this year, UK pharmaceutical companies are required to publicly disclose details of certain payments and transfers of value made to health professionals and healthcare organisations. This is part of an industry move towards greater transparency to provide patients with information about these relationships.

Payments or benefits in kind made to UK nurses by pharmaceutical companies in 2015 will be disclosed on a publicly accessible central database from June, which will be available on the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) website.

The Disclosure UK database will be searchable by a number of criteria, including health professionals’ names and work addresses. The data will be downloadable by health professionals and the general public.

Annual publication of these payments is required for compliance with the ABPI Code of Practice for the Pharmaceutical Industry 2016 (2016). Data will be accessible for three years.

Disclosed activities could include:
- Speaking at and chairing meetings;
- Training;
- Advisory board meetings;
- Participation in market research that involves remuneration;
- Fees and expenses;
- Sponsorship of attendance at meetings, including costs of accommodation and travel, inside and outside the UK;
- Donations, grants and benefits in kind provided.

What is a transfer of value?
The term “transfer of value” means a direct or indirect transfer of value, whether in cash, in kind or otherwise, in connection with the development or sale of medicines. A direct transfer of value is one made directly by a company for the benefit of a recipient. An indirect transfer is one made by a third party on behalf of a company for the benefit of a recipient where the identity of the company is known to, or can be identified by, the recipient (ABPI, 2015).

Why is it happening?
Since 2012, the UK pharmaceutical industry has annually published details of payments made to health professionals as a total figure, as a requirement of the ABPI Code of Practice to bring transparency to the relationship between health professionals. In 2014, this figure was £41m.

This year, for the first time, the UK pharmaceutical industry and all countries across Europe who follow the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industry Associations (EFPIA) Code of Practice, will publish individual payments and transfers of value made to health professionals.

This push for greater transparency has been set out in the ABPI and EFPIA codes of practice to ensure patients can have confidence that the relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and health professionals is open and transparent.

What does the healthcare community think?
According to a recent survey (ComRes, 2016) of 508 doctors, nurses and pharmacists, commissioned by the ABPI, 87% thought payments from pharmaceutical companies to individually named health professionals should be transparent. Seventy-seven of the 508 said they had a current relationship with a drug company for which they received payment or benefit in kind, with two-thirds of these saying they had given or are likely to give permission for these companies to disclose their payment information.

The survey revealed that 26% of the 508 thought it was unnecessary to declare payments from pharmaceutical companies to individually named health professionals and 24% said declaring these payments would adversely affect medical innovation.

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References