

Please send letters to:

Dr. Tim Rutledge,
President & Chief Executive Officer
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North York, Ontario

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Dear

I have become aware of the upcoming Paediatric Update, March 2, 2013. I am concerned and alarmed that the event is being sponsored by the leading North American manufacturers of infant formula; Mead Johnson Nutrition and Abbott Nutrition.

Importantly, I wish to share with you our deep concerns regarding this sponsorship by the manufacturers of infant formula products for educational events dealing with infant and young child nutrition and health. Because the North York General Hospital is an important health care facility it bears a unique responsibility to uphold the principles and aims of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI). A core principle of the BFHI is adherence to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions on infant and young child nutrition.

Sponsorship or other financial assistance by manufacturers of infant feeding products for those working in infant and young child health is in violation of the obligations that companies, health care professionals and their associations have under the International Code and WHA resolutions. Mead Johnson and Abbott have a long history of violating the provisions of the International Code not only in Canada but globally as well. The WHO estimates that approximately 1.5 million infants die every year because they were not breastfed.

Specifically, WHA Resolution 49.15 states in its opening paragraphs,

Concerned that health institutions and ministries may be subject to subtle pressure to accept, inappropriately, financial or other support for professional training in infant and child health;

And urges Member States to take the following measures:

(2) to ensure that the financial support for professionals working in infant and young child health does not create conflicts of interest, especially with regard to the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative;

(3) to ensure that monitoring the application of the International Code and subsequent relevant resolutions is carried out in a transparent, independent manner, free from commercial influence;

This resolution was re-affirmed subsequently at the World Health Organization Executive Board resolution EB115/7 (4),

“...financial support for professionals working in infant and young child health does not create conflicts of interest;

The sponsorship of the Paediatric Update by these infant formula manufacturers – Mead Johnson Nutrition and Abbott Nutrition, is, sadly not only a betrayal to the community it serves, the families, parents, mothers and infants in the North York region, but also puts the its staff into a compromised situation. Additionally it should be noted that the Canadian government has endorsed the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and all relevant infant and young child nutrition resolutions of the World Health Assembly. Also ratified by Canada is the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC mandates health care systems to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for children. This is realized by taking measures to protect and promote the best possible nutrition, which is breastfeeding.

I urge you to rescind the offending conflicts of interest and the betrayal of mothers and children; to cancel the sponsorship agreement with Mead Johnson and Abbott and to seek “independent” sources of funding for your educational programs. North York mothers and children would be the beneficiaries and North York General Hospital staff will be able to exercise their responsibilities without conflicts of interest.