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Dental notes

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Relationships between health professionals and industry: maintaining a delicate balance

The level of prescribing that occurs in the average dental practice is not usually such that it attracts the attention of pharmaceutical companies' marketing departments. However, we are large consumers of restorative materials, medicaments and other products. We rely on a good working relationship with dental supply companies who not only offer access to these products, but are also often involved in research related to them. It is most likely that dentists are not aware of the influence that advertising,

'special offers', personal visits by company representatives, endorsements and trade shows have on our purchasing habits.

What dental practitioners purchase or prescribe should always be done on the basis of available scientific evidence with patients' interest utmost in our minds. In fact, in the majority of practices it is not the dentists who purchase these items, but rather the practice manager on the advice of the dentist, advice that may not be consistently available. Situations of conflict and duality of interest may well be relatively common in the dental profession, and these should be acknowledged and dealt with in an open manner. Currently, the Australian Dental Association is developing a policy to advise its members where these conflicts and dualities of interests arise.

Medicines Australia Code of Conduct: breaches

Medicines Australia has a Code of Conduct to guide the promotion of prescription drugs by pharmaceutical companies in Australia. A new edition of the Code has recently been approved.¹ Complaints are considered by the Code of Conduct Committee and the results are published in its annual report. The report for 2006–07 is available on the Medicines Australia website.²

This year's report contains detailed information about 41 complaints. In fourteen cases no breach of the Code was found.

Table 1 shows the 27 complaints in which at least one breach of the Code was found. As usual, most of the complaints were made by rival pharmaceutical companies, but 12 were made by health professionals.

Most of the breaches were for using misleading information in promotional material. Some of the larger fines were imposed on companies that had allowed the public to be exposed to their promotions. Two complaints related to a company which sponsored the national conference of a patient support