

Medicines Australia Code of Conduct: breaches

(Aust Prescr 2011;34:189)

The Medicines Australia Code of Conduct guides the promotion of prescription products by pharmaceutical companies.¹ Each year Medicines Australia publishes a report, from its Code of Conduct Committee, which details all the complaints that have been received about advertising and other promotional activities.

Considering all the advertising and the thousands of educational events sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry, complaints are uncommon. Of the 24 complaints considered in 2010–11, 14 were found in breach of the code. Only four of these breaches were identified from complaints made by health

professionals. One of these resulted in a fine of \$200 000 after a company offered funding to an area health service contingent on the number of patients treated with its products. Table 1 shows the complaints where at least one breach was identified, and more details can be found in the full report.²

References

1. Medicines Australia. Code of Conduct. 16th ed. 2010. www.medicinesaustralia.com.au [cited 2011 Nov 8]
2. Medicines Australia. Code of Conduct Annual Report 2011. www.medicinesaustralia.com.au [cited 2011 Nov 8]

Table 1

Breaches of the Code of Conduct July 2010 – June 2011

Company	Brand (generic) name	Material or activity	Sanction
Alcon Laboratories Australia	–	Disease education booklet	\$5 000 fine Withdraw glaucoma information booklet and do not use it again in the same or similar form
AstraZeneca	Nexium (esomeprazole)	Media release	\$75 000 fine Do not distribute the media release again in the same or similar form
	–	Educational event	\$15 000 fine
Bayer Australia	–	Advertising campaign to the general public	\$10 000 fine
Janssen-Cilag	Concerta (methylphenidate)	Media release	\$15 000 fine Do not distribute the media release again
Merck Serono Australia	Movectro (cladribine)	News item	\$20 000 fine
Novartis Pharmaceuticals	Exforge and Exforge HCT (amlodipine combinations)	Advertising campaign	\$50 000 fine Cease using misleading claim in advertising
Pfizer	Lipitor (atorvastatin)	Advertisement	\$20 000 fine Cease publication of advertisements
Roche Products	MabThera (rituximab)	Media release	\$30 000 fine
	Pegasys (peginterferon alfa-2a)	Financial support for medical practice activities	\$200 000 fine
	Mircera (methoxy polyethylene glycol-epoetin beta)	Posters, website, dosing card	\$200 000 fine Cease use of all materials and website Send a corrective letter to healthcare professionals Place the corrective letter on the website
Sanofi-aventis	Actonel (risedronate)	Media release	\$20 000 fine Do not distribute the media release again
Sanofi Pasteur	Adacel and Acel (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis vaccines)	Advertising campaign	\$50 000 fine
Schering Plough (subsidiary of Merck Sharp & Dohme Australia)	Simponi (golimumab)	Promotional material	Send a corrective letter to all rheumatologists in Australia Publish corrective advertisement