

# GENERAL PRACTITIONER v PFIZER and BOEHRINGER INGELHEIM

## Spiriva journal advertisement

A general practitioner complained about the claim 'Help them live life, not a COPD [Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] life' in a journal advertisement for Spiriva (tiotropium) which was co-promoted by Pfizer and Boehringer Ingelheim. The matter was taken up with both companies.

The complainant noted COPD was a chronic, progressive and incurable disease associated with various symptoms which affected patients' quality of life. Spiriva, like other treatments, improved patients' quality of life to a greater or lesser extent, but, the claim at issue went one step too far and suggested that Spiriva cured COPD. The wording '... not a COPD life' suggested that patients would not be troubled by any ongoing symptoms once treatment with Spiriva was initiated. This was misleading and exaggerated the fact that whilst Spiriva would improve clinical outcomes it would never permit patients to live a life free of COPD ie 'not a COPD life'.

In the Panel's view the intended audience would be well aware that COPD was incurable and that treatment was aimed at the alleviation of symptoms. The Panel did not consider that the advertisement would mislead readers into thinking that Spiriva was different in that regard. Further, the claim stated 'Help [emphasis added] them live life, not a COPD life'. The Panel did not consider that the claim implied that Spiriva cured COPD as alleged. No breach of the Code was ruled.

A general practitioner complained about a journal advertisement (ref SPI/SPV 1445) for Spiriva (tiotropium) which was co-promoted by Pfizer Limited and Boehringer Ingelheim Limited. The matter was taken up with both companies which submitted identical responses.

### COMPLAINT

The complainant noted that the advertisement stated 'Help them live life, not a COPD life'. An indisputable fact was that COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] was a chronic, progressive and incurable disease which was associated with various symptoms which affected patients' quality of life. Also indisputable was the fact that, like Spiriva, there were other treatments which positively impacted patients' quality of life, to a greater or lesser extent. However, the above unqualified claim went one step too far and suggested that Spiriva was a curative treatment for COPD. The wording '... not a COPD life' promoted the position that patients would not be troubled by any

ongoing symptoms of COPD once treatment with Spiriva was initiated. This claim was misleading and exaggerated the fact that whilst Spiriva would improve clinical outcomes it would never abolish the effects of COPD completely or otherwise, such as to permit patients to live a life free of COPD ie 'not a COPD life'.

When writing to Pfizer and Boehringer Ingelheim, the Authority asked them to respond in relation to Clauses 7.2, 7.4 and 7.10 of the Code.

### RESPONSE

The companies acknowledged that COPD was a chronic progressive and incurable disease which was associated with various symptoms - breathlessness, cough, wheeze - which affected patients' quality of life and referred to the following quotation from a British Lung Foundation (BLF) booklet, 'What is COPD':

'COPD can lead to feelings of anxiety because of breathlessness. People with it may reduce their activities to avoid becoming breathless. But by reducing activity levels you become less fit and therefore get breathless even sooner when you try to do any activity. People with COPD may adapt their lifestyles to reduce breathlessness.'

The overall quality of life for people with advanced COPD was about four times worse than for those with severe asthma when the two were assessed using similar quality of life questionnaires (BLF Lung Report III). The problems of restricted mobility were compounded by social isolation and poor self-esteem. A Breathe Easy survey found that 90% of COPD patients were unable to participate in socially important activities such as gardening or going dancing, two-thirds were unable to take a holiday because of their disease and one-third had socially disabling breathlessness (BLF Lung Report III). The claim at issue referred to the quality of life of COPD patients such as that described in this report.

'Help them live life, not a COPD life' referred to Spiriva's ability to improve patient-centred outcomes like breathlessness, exercise tolerance and quality of life. References were clearly cited in the advertisement.

'Help them live life, not a COPD life' referred to Spiriva as part of the management of COPD which *helped* patients to achieve a better quality of life. It was not meant as life without COPD, as it was widely accepted (including by the complainant) that COPD was a chronic, progressive and incurable disease.

The companies had not claimed that Spiriva was a curative treatment for COPD or that patients would not be troubled by any ongoing symptoms of COPD once treatment with Spiriva was initiated. But they had claimed that treatment with Spiriva might help patients lead a more normal life.

The companies did not consider that the advertisement was in breach of Clauses 7.2, 7.4 and 7.10 of the Code.

#### **PANEL RULING**

In the Panel's view the intended audience would be well aware that COPD was incurable and that

treatment was aimed at the alleviation of symptoms. The Panel did not consider that those reading the advertisement would be misled into thinking that Spiriva was different in that regard. Further, the claim stated '**Help** [emphasis added] them live life, not a COPD life'. The Panel did not consider that the claim implied that Spiriva was a curative treatment for COPD as alleged. No breach of Clauses 7.2, 7.4 and 7.10 was ruled.

**Complaint received**      24 January 2007

**Case completed**         12 March 2007