

# ANONYMOUS v WYETH

## Alleged inappropriate hospitality

An anonymous complaint was received about inappropriate hospitality alleged to have been provided by three pharmaceutical companies, one of which was Wyeth. The complainant provided a copy of the programme for a meeting of the Midlands Psychiatric Research Group to be held in June 2007.

The complainant alleged that a few psychiatrists under the name of 'West Midland Research Group' had been using pharmaceutical companies for their personal advantages, ambitions and growth. The group organised one meeting a year and called it an international conference. There was no scientific committee, no invitation for research abstracts or poster. The group invited whom it wanted to. Until last year the registration fee was very little, about £15. Delegates were allowed to have free hotel, food and an evening cultural programme. It was inappropriate hospitality at the expense of pharmaceutical companies. Even delegates might not be aware that pharmaceutical companies had given money.

The Panel noted that there were some differences between the programme for the 2007 meeting submitted by Wyeth and that provided by the complainant.

The programme provided by Wyeth gave no details about which companies were providing educational grants.

Wyeth had not decided whether it was going to sponsor the 2007 meeting or not. If it were to sponsor the meeting it would be limited to the scientific meeting only and not the sponsorship of delegates. Wyeth would not provide sponsorship for the social programme or for family members.

The Panel considered that according to the programme, the scientific/educational content was not unreasonable for sponsorship by a pharmaceutical company. The meeting appeared to be primarily scientific/educational. The programme referred only to 'Dinner' each evening. The Panel noted the allegations about the cultural musical event. There was no mention of this on the programme. It considered that if there was to be such entertainment then it would be inappropriate for a pharmaceutical company to sponsor it.

The Panel considered that as Wyeth had not agreed to sponsor the 2007 meeting there could be no breach of the Code and ruled accordingly.

An anonymous complaint was received about inappropriate hospitality alleged to have been provided by three pharmaceutical companies, one of which was Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

## COMPLAINT

The complainant stated that a few psychiatrists under the name of 'West Midland Research Group' had been using pharmaceutical companies for their personal advantages, ambitions and growth. They had organised a conference and taken money from pharmaceutical companies for it. In fact nobody knew what West Midland Research Group was; no research was conducted or published by this group and there was no research grant or funding available for this group. The group organised one meeting a year and called it an international conference. There was no scientific committee, no invitation for research abstracts or poster. The group invited whom it wanted to. Until last year the registration fee was very little, about £15. Delegates were allowed to have free hotel, food and an evening cultural programme. It was inappropriate hospitality at the expense of pharmaceutical companies. Even delegates might not be aware that pharmaceutical companies had given money.

The few psychiatrists used this money to invite speakers who they wanted to oblige and they were friendly. They paid their fare, speaker fees, and hotel expenses. They used pharmaceutical company money for hospitality of delegates who seemed to be their friends and repeatedly attended their conference. They all enjoyed the evening cultural programme. It was like an annual get-together for them.

The group had taken money from Wyeth this time. One of the organisers maintained the data base of most of the Asian and Arabic psychiatrists. It was a number game. They had numbers to influence pharmaceutical companies and pharmaceutical companies tried to oblige vulnerable psychiatrists who could increase the prescriptions.

The pharmaceutical companies wanted to sell their medicines and it was a good nexus to have mutual benefits. It was worth investigating.

More or less the same delegates attended their other meetings such as the South Asian Forum meeting. The majority of delegates were the same every year. It was indicated that money was paid directly to 'West Midland Research Group' and they used this money as they wanted for cultural programmes, hotel and other expenses.

Delegates were motivated by the free hotel and sense of holiday; until last year they were allowed to bring their family, meeting common friends and enjoying a night cultural programme.

Organisers benefited by trying to influence and build up relationship with world prominent psychiatrists

who they invited as speakers and then used them for personal growth. They got impressed by seeing a large number of psychiatrists.

The motivating factor for pharmaceutical companies was taking advantage of numbers and trying to sell their medicines.

When writing to Wyeth, the Authority asked it to respond in relation to Clauses 2, 9.1 and 19.1.

## RESPONSE

Wyeth stated that it was not aware of the existence of the West Midlands Research Group. The Midland Psychiatric Research Group ran an annual scientific meeting aimed mainly at Asian psychiatrists at which eminent speakers were invited from all over the world. Wyeth's outlined its interactions with this group in 2005 and 2006 and noted that it was currently reviewing a request to provide sponsorship for the group's 2007 annual meeting to be held in Coventry. Any such sponsorship would be limited to part sponsorship of the scientific meeting only and again it was not considering the sponsorship of delegates. At this stage Wyeth did not have copies of the invitations and therefore did not know if family members were also invited to any part of the event. Wyeth did not know what the whole cost of the meeting would be. The draft agenda was provided. At this stage Wyeth did not have comprehensive details of the arrangements of any social programme and it would not provide any sponsorship for these. Wyeth did not know how the delegates were invited, but it believed that they came from throughout the UK, and it was clear that the speakers were invited internationally.

As a part of Wyeth's review of this sponsorship request it had noted a statement from a website which identified the ethical guidelines of the Midland Psychiatric Research Group.

*'COVENTRY (UK): Midland Psychiatric Research Group followed the ethical guidelines while organizing its annual conference which was funded by the pharmaceutical companies. To begin with all the participants were informed that:*

- 1. Latest ethical guidelines will be followed. It clearly states that "academic meetings will only be attended by medical professionals and spouses or non-medical guests will not be allowed to participate in the academic and social functions organized during this meeting." It was strictly enforced.*
- 2. All the invited speakers declared before their presentations the research grants, honorarium or any other consultation fees etc., which they have received in the past along with the name of the companies.*
- 3. No representative of the pharmaceutical companies who had sponsored any function or had extended any financial assistance to the organizers was invited to the official conference banquet.*
- 4. The musical programme arranged at the Banquet was funded by the organizers from the Registration Fee and not by any pharmaceutical company.'*

From the above and for the following reasons Wyeth denied breaches of Clauses 2, 9.1 and 19.1.

Clause 19.1 referred to 'Meetings and Hospitality'. Wyeth believed that the facilities and hospitality provided at these meetings complied with the requirements of Clause 19.1:

- Prior to sponsoring the meeting in 2006, Wyeth reviewed a draft agenda: this showed that the meetings had a clear scientific content and were continuing professional development (CPD) approved. Wyeth noted that these meetings were organised in collaboration with the World Psychiatric Association and the World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation.
- The amount of sponsorship was appropriate. For the 2006 meeting when Wyeth provided £6,000 of sponsorship there were over 100 delegates ie £60 per delegate which seemed reasonable as this would only cover part of the accommodation costs. The delegates had to pay a £40 registration fee themselves.
- The venues were appropriate and conducive to the main purpose of the meetings.
- The level of subsistence in 2006 was modest and secondary to the nature of the meeting.
- On the registration form the following was printed *'As this meeting is funded by pharmaceutical companies, we are obliged to follow the recent guidelines that clearly say that academic meetings will only be attended by medical professionals, and spouses or non medical guests will not be allowed to participate in the academic or social functions organised during this meeting'*. Given that delegates had to pay a £40 registration fee and the organisers' clear awareness of Code issues, Wyeth did not consider that its financial contribution paid for or subsidised any social element of the agenda.

As Wyeth believed that there had been no breach of Clause 19.1, this led it to believe that neither Clause 2 nor Clause 9.1 had been breached.

## PANEL RULING

The Panel noted that there were some differences between the programme for the 2007 meeting submitted by Wyeth and that provided by the complainant. The Panel noted that the 2007 meeting was to start on the evening of 14 June with a lecture and dinner. According to the programme provided by Wyeth, the programme for Friday 15 June ran from 9.15am until 4.45pm and the arrangements for Saturday were similar, 9.30am until 5pm. There were small differences in timing in the agenda provided by the complainant.

The programme provided by Wyeth gave no details about which companies were providing educational grants.

The Panel noted that the complainant included the programme for the 2007 meeting. No specific allegations had been made about other meetings. Wyeth had provided details of its interactions with the West Midlands Research Group since 2005.

The 2007 meeting was to be held in Coventry. Wyeth had not decided that it was going to sponsor the meeting. If it were to sponsor the meeting it would be limited to the scientific meeting only and not the sponsorship of delegates. Wyeth would not provide sponsorship for the social programme or for family members.

The Panel considered that according to the programme, the scientific/educational content was not unreasonable for sponsorship by a pharmaceutical company. The meeting appeared to be primarily scientific/educational. The programme referred only to 'Dinner' each evening. The Panel noted the allegations

about the cultural musical event. There was no mention of this on the programme. It considered that if there was to be such entertainment then it would be inappropriate for a pharmaceutical company to sponsor it.

The Panel considered that as Wyeth had not agreed to sponsor the 2007 meeting there could be no breach of Clauses 2, 9.1 and 19.1 and ruled accordingly.

**Complaint received** 27 April 2007

**Case completed** 21 May 2007