

ANONYMOUS GENERAL PRACTITIONER v MERCK SHARP & DOHME

Invitation to a meeting

An anonymous complaint was received from a general practitioner about an invitation to a meeting issued by Merck Sharp & Dohme.

The complainant stated that the invitation was one of the most unprofessional invitations he had seen. It took a while to try to figure out where it came from.

The Panel noted that the invitation stated 'Dear ...' immediately followed by 'Merck Sharp & Dohme cordially invites you to attend a medical meeting entitled: ...'. Details of the meeting followed. The letter was signed by two representatives. The company name followed each representative's job title. The bottom of the letter stated 'Meeting sponsored by Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited'.

The Panel noted that although the invitation did not appear to have been printed on headed paper, it was clear that it was from Merck Sharp & Dohme. The arrangements for the meeting were also clear. The Panel did not consider that the invitation was unprofessional as alleged and no breach of the Code was ruled.

An anonymous complaint was received from a general practitioner about an invitation to a meeting issued by Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited

COMPLAINT

The complainant stated that the invitation issued by two Merck Sharp & Dohme representatives, was one of the most unprofessional invitations he had seen. It took a while to try to figure out where it came from, and if the representatives whose names were on it were really senior and executive representatives, suggesting a length of time and training with the company, they should know better.

The complainant had recently received a copy of the Guidance on the Code for Health Professionals. This did not cover the use of invitations, but other invitations the complainant had received seemed to have had a much more professional look about them and at least the company name was displayed so you knew where it was from. The complainant was sure that Merck Sharp & Dohme had a better procedure for invitations and queried

if this was a representative training issue.

The Authority asked Merck Sharp & Dohme to respond in relation to the requirements of Clause 15.2 of the Code.

RESPONSE

Merck Sharp & Dohme was sorry that the complainant felt the invitation was unclear, it was based on a template which met all of the requirements of the Code. Merck Sharp & Dohme's involvement was clear in both the first line, and the last line. The subject matter, agenda and logistical arrangements were clear, as were the limitations such as inability to accommodate spouses.

Merck Sharp & Dohme therefore submitted that high standards had been maintained by its representatives, and that no breach had occurred.

Merck Sharp & Dohme stated that both representatives had passed the ABPI representatives' examination.

PANEL RULING

The Panel noted that the copy of the invitation provided by the complainant stated 'Dear ...' immediately followed by 'Merck Sharp & Dohme cordially invites you to attend a medical meeting entitled: ...'. Details of the meeting followed. The letter was signed by two representatives. The company name followed each representative's job title. The bottom of the letter stated 'Meeting sponsored by Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited'.

The Panel noted that although the invitation did not appear to have been printed on headed paper, it was clear that it was an invitation from Merck Sharp & Dohme. The arrangements for the meeting were also clear. The Panel did not consider that the invitation was unprofessional as suggested by the complainant. The Panel ruled no breach of Clause 15.2.

Complaint received 18 May 2007

Case completed 18 June 2007