

ETHICS AND LACTATION CONSULTANT PRACTICE

IBLCE Code of Ethics, tenet 24:
Adhere to those provisions of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* and subsequent resolutions that pertain to health workers.

The aim of the Code is to contribute to "safe and adequate nutrition for infants" by protecting breastfeeding and ensuring that artificial feeding happens only when necessary, with adequate information, and without commercial influence. (*Article 1*)

The Code applies to any product which is represented to fully or partially replace breast milk, as well as feeding bottles and teats. (*Article 2*)

Health workers have a responsibility to be familiar with the Code and to understand their responsibilities in their own healthcare roles. (*Article 7.1*)

Implications in IBCLC practice

In relation to the Code, there are two relevant issues that should underlie an IBCLC's decision-making process and subsequent actions:

Is it a breach of the WHO International Code and/or the IBLCE Code of Ethics?

Even if it is not a breach, what are the potential implications, short and long term, of aligning yourself in some way with a company marketing products within the scope of the Code?

Conferences with full or partial sponsorship by formula companies. Should you go? Should you accept an invitation to speak?

It is a matter of personal choice. However, you may wish to consider the following issues. To what degree was the company involved? Is the program organised by the company, or is it organised by an independent body, with company sponsorship? Did the company have input into the choice of speakers, topics or the content of any presentations? Was the funding a contribution to the general costs of the meeting or payment for a specific lecturer or segment?

There should be full and open disclosure of funding. A declaration of conflict of interest should be made by the speakers.

Conferences and the Code of Ethics by Ros Escott IBCLC

Should you attend?

It is a personal decision. If enough people protest or stay away, the organisers will get the message that formula company sponsorship of breastfeeding or paediatric/nutrition conferences is not acceptable. You may like to educate your professional association and encourage it to take a stance. As IBCLCs we should give priority to supporting conferences and education programs which take an ethical stance on sponsorship, even if registration is necessarily more expensive.

Should you accept an invitation to speak at this conference?

Think long and hard about the possible implications. Find out as much as you can about the nature of the sponsorship: there is a difference between a program organised by a company, and a program organised by an independent body, with company sponsorship.

It is not, in itself, a breach of the International Code to speak at a conference which has significant sponsorship from a formula company. But you should be aware that you are treading on potentially dangerous ground and it can backfire on you. For example, your name or photograph may be used before, during or after the conference in a way which implies a personal recommendation of the company or a particular product. You may be asked or required by the company to tailor your contribution to the conference to suit their purpose. Others may perceive that you have a relationship with the company, which may or may not be correct.

Your ethics may be questioned. Even though you may not have breached the Code, colleagues may hear about your involvement and disapprove of your participation. A perceived association with a company can potentially close other doors for you in the future.

You are offered an honorarium as well as money to cover your travel costs

The International Code says: If any contribution for your time, travel or other expenses is made by the company, directly to you or paid on your behalf, both you and the company are obliged to disclose this contribution to any institutions with which you are affiliated. (*Article 7.5*)

It is better not to accept any payment – if you do, you have to comply with the above disclosures. Be aware that even when you do not accept payment, in this situation some colleagues may still choose to believe that you were paid, and that you have an association with the company.

What if the sponsoring institution receives formula company money without strings attached?

If the sponsorship is for the conference generally, and not designated for speakers, sessions, etc., then the potential association between you and the company is *theoretically* decreased. It is not a potential Code violation, but it is still an ethical issue. Investigate the situation thoroughly. Sponsorship is a marketing strategy – find out what the company is getting in return for its sponsorship. Have a written contract with the organisers that addresses your potential concerns.

Some IBCLCs decide that they cannot in good conscience speak at a sponsored conference. They feel that no opportunity to provide information, no honorarium, is worth "selling out" to this industry. Other IBCLCs have made a disclaimer from the podium before beginning their talks, that they have no association with this company and that the information shared with the group is in no way influenced by this company.

What if a formula company has paid for the conference lunch?

It is not a breach of the International Code to eat the lunch. However, you may choose not to because you don't feel comfortable, or you may choose to make a statement by not attending the lunch, not eating the lunch, or bringing your own lunch if that is an option.

There is no such thing as a free lunch.