

When money and medicine mix: Managing conflicts of interest when doctors engage with industry

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**Te Kaunihera
Rata o
Aotearoa**

Medical
Council of
New Zealand

True or False

Question 1

New Zealand does not ban doctors from engaging in dual practice (combining public and private practice).

Answer: True

True or False

Question 2

New Zealand has laws to ban those who prescribe medicines from owning pharmacies.

Answer: True

True or False

Question 3

New Zealand has laws to ban doctors from referring patients to a clinical facility which the doctor has a financial interest.

Answer: False

Doctors and health-related commercial organisations

Key points

Health-related commercial organisations may influence how doctors practise and the clinical decisions they make. It is essential that you recognise this potential influence and take appropriate steps to avoid and manage any bias or conflicts of interest, both real and perceived, that may arise from your interactions with health-related commercial organisations.

Failure to do so could compromise your clinical objectivity and the care you provide to your patients. It could also lead to unnecessary care and/or inappropriate use of health resources. In addition, it could erode the trust and confidence that patients have in doctors, and how the public perceives the medical profession.

Integrity and transparency are vital. Ensure that your conduct and decisions justify your patients' trust in you, and the public's trust in the profession. Your primary concern as a doctor must always be the care of your patients.

About this statement

Healthcare in New Zealand is provided by a mix of public, private and non-governmental organisation (NGO) providers. Doctors may work for, or have interests across, entities that include health-related commercial organisations.

This statement outlines what is expected of you when you interact with health-related commercial organisations. It is intended to guide you to recognise, assess and manage conflicts of interest, or perceived conflicts of interest, that may arise. However, the guidance in this statement is not exhaustive, so you will need to exercise your judgement when applying it to your situation. If you are unsure what to do, you should seek independent advice.

How does a conflict of interest arise?



Source: istockphoto.com

How does industry influence doctors?

Through marketing and promotional activities.

Doctors who accept gifts, inducements and sponsorship often show a positive bias to that company's products or services.

Affiliations with industry can subconsciously influence a doctor's judgement and clinical practice.



Dr Jeffrey F Caren's collection of pens from pharmaceutical companies. Photo taken by J Emilio Flores for The New York Times.



Sourced from www.freepik.com

Areas where conflict of interest may arise



Patient referrals



Selling products to patients



Industry sponsored medical education



Engaging in research



Advisory / consultancy
services to industry



Governance / leadership role

Principles to consider when doctors interact with industry



Integrity is a key aspect of professionalism



Prioritise the patient's interests



Be open and transparent about relationships with industry

Principles to consider when doctors interact with industry



Document and disclose any incentives from industry for a doctor's services



Critically appraise information from industry



Beware of the potential to overtreat

Referring patients to a clinical facility the doctor owns or has a financial interest in

Fully disclose
nature of financial interest

**Provide accurate
information**
to facilitate informed
decisions

Advise patients
of suitable alternatives



Photo sourced from www.freepik.com

Don't pressure patient
into receiving care at a
facility

Assure patient
that their choice of
clinical facility will not
have an adverse effect
on the doctor's care

**Document the
disclosure**
in the patient's notes

Some closing thoughts

Vital to manage conflicts of interests appropriately (especially with increasing commercialisation in healthcare).



Recognise that no doctor is immune to the influence of industry.



Inappropriately managed relationships between doctors and industry can:

compromise the doctor-patient relationship

undermine trust between doctors and their communities

erode integrity of the medical profession



WELLINGTON CABLE CAR

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DO NOT
WALK ON
TRACKS