



The advice in this column was extracted from replies to the specific circumstances and situations mentioned in the queries which were sent to the Ethics Committee. Different circumstances may result in different opinions. Please email your comments to news@sma.org.sg.

Appearing in a TV info-education video clip

A query was received from an SMA member regarding an invitation for him to appear in a short video clip, which would be shown on TV as part of an info-education programme sponsored by a milk company. There would be no mention of milk products in the clip.

The Committee is of the opinion that the short video clip is unlikely to appear in isolation, and will likely appear in association with a commercial or commercially-sponsored clip. The doctor will have to insist on viewing the clip in its entirety, and satisfy himself that the clip in its entirety does not appear or suggest any endorsement of a commercial product.

The doctor was advised to note the following SMC Ethical Guidelines:

4.5.1.2 Association with non-medical companies or non-medical products or service

A doctor may be associated in an official capacity with a non-medical product or service or with a non-medical company. His position may be shown on the company's stationery, literature or website, but the doctor shall be careful not to include any reference to his professional qualifications or services. A doctor is not prohibited from conducting non-medical business, but this must be clearly separated from his medical practice and his medical qualifications so that the public is not misled into believing that the non-medical product or service is medically beneficial or is being endorsed by a doctor.

4.6.3.1 Sponsored educational events and research

A doctor may be invited to participate in medical events, conferences, talks, publications or educational websites sponsored by companies marketing pharmaceutical or medical products. The doctor shall ensure that his participation does

not occur in such a way as to appear to endorse such products, or to persuade patients or members of the public to use the products.

Inviting patients to speak about their experience

A query was received from an SMA member regarding a request from a PR company for patients with fibromyalgia to share their experience in an event in an overseas setting.

The Committee suggested that:

- If the doctor feels that there is some value in such public education projects, he may convey the invitation to his patients. The doctor should not actively provide a list of patients' names and contact to the agent, leaving the agent to contact the patients. Without explicit permission from the patients, this is an invasion of patient privacy and breach of patient confidentiality.
- The doctor should get as much information as possible from the agent and share it with potential candidates (patients). When communicating with the patient, the doctor should take great care to be explicitly clear that this is a voluntary exercise that has no impact whatsoever on the doctor-patient relationship. The doctor can also offer to advise the patient after the latter has obtained full information from the agent.
- If any patient is interested, he should be the one contacting the agent so that he can further explore the project and decide based on a consideration of the benefits and inconvenience involved. Since it is the patient who decides and voluntarily shares his personal medical information, there is no breach of medical confidentiality.

It is key that the decision rests with the patient, based on his comprehension of adequate information, and absence of any infringement on his voluntariness. **SMA**