

## EFPIA CODE UPDATED

The new EFPIA (European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations) Code of Practice on the Promotion of Medicines was officially launched at the EFPIA meeting at the beginning of June. National bodies, such as the ABPI, have until the end of 2005 to integrate the new requirements in their national Codes. The national codes, such as the ABPI Code of Practice, may be more stringent, but not less stringent, than the EFPIA Code. In the UK, the provisions of the EFPIA Code will be incorporated into the new Code which is currently under discussion and due to come into effect on 1 January, 2006.

At first sight, the new EFPIA Code appears significantly different from the previous one, perhaps not surprisingly since this dates back to 1993. It is now considerably longer, but this is a result of more explanation and more detail, rather than wholly new provisions. Much of this will look very familiar to anyone used to working with the ABPI Code. There are however some changes which will significantly affect companies in the UK.

### **Which Code?**

Promotion throughout Europe will now be subject not only to the Code of the country undertaking the promotion, but also the Code of the country in which the promotion takes place. This has been the case at least to some extent in the UK, where for instance, all activity at International Meetings held in the UK has been subject to the UK Code, regardless of who has organised it. Until now, however, a UK company holding for example, an Advisory Board in Italy, would have had to comply only with the ABPI Code; now it would appear that such a meeting will also be subject to the requirements of the Italian Code. In all cases, the more restrictive Code will apply.

### **Meetings**

But this may be less of a problem than it appears because another significant change is that 'no company may organize or sponsor an event that takes place outside its home country'. There are two exceptions to this. One is when most of the attendees are from outside the home country and it makes logistic sense to hold the event elsewhere e.g. a UK company organising a meeting of consultants from all over Europe, with only a minority of UK attendees, could hold the meeting at a convenient location somewhere in mainland Europe. The other exception is when, logistically, it makes more sense to hold the meeting in the country where the main resource or expertise of the meeting is located. An example of this may be a visit to a state of the art research facility. It might also be argued that holding a meeting for UK doctors in Stockholm would be acceptable if this was arranged to coincide with an International Scientific Meeting which they would all be attending. However, exactly how this will be interpreted will eventually be determined only by case precedents.

What is clear however, is that this is the final nail in the coffin of the stand-alone all-UK meeting overseas. These meetings have become increasingly difficult to justify in the face of criticism in the press and the Health Select Committee, and they have been dealt with more and more severely by the ABPI Code. (One company struggled to defend a very modest meeting in Brussels.)

The end may also be nigh for meetings at Alton Towers or other similar venues, as another addition requires that 'Companies should avoid using venues that are renowned for their entertainment facilities.'

### **Information for patients**

Perhaps the most interesting change is the addition, as an Annex to the Code, of Guidelines for Internet websites (not surprisingly, there was no mention of the Internet in the 1993 Code). This provides a fairly detailed description of how a company can place non-promotional information on its products on websites for patients and the general public. The information must be factual, balanced and consistent with the SPC – as is currently required by the present ABPI Code, for all information to the public – but it would appear that this offers the potential for much greater freedom for companies to communicate directly with patients and the public about their products. This is something that the industry, and at least some segments of the population, have been advocating for some time. It remains to be seen exactly how this will be translated into the new UK Code.

The EFPIA Code is available on the EFPIA website [www.efpia.org](http://www.efpia.org)