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European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations

Working Together for Patients: Advisory Boards

Collaboration between industry and health professionals benefits patients. It is a relationship that has delivered numerous innovative medicines and changed the way many diseases impact on our lives. Industry and health professionals collaborate in a range of activities from clinical research to sharing best clinical practice and exchanging information on how new medicines fit into the patient pathway.

What is an Advisory Board?

An Advisory Board is a group of external experts convened by a company to get their professional advice and insights on a specific topic for which the expertise and knowledge are not available within the company. Advisors (experts in their areas) could be healthcare professionals (HCP), payers, patients, representatives of patient associations, patient advisors and non-HCP specialists, e.g. Market Access specialists.

Covering scientific and / or healthcare-related issues, Advisory Boards help medicines companies to better understand the external environment, therapeutic area, data and use of products approved or in development, clinical and medical asset strategies, or unmet medical needs. Advisory Boards are not used to promote a company's medicines and must not constitute an inducement to recommend, prescribe, purchase, supply, sell or administer specific medicinal products.

Who benefits from an Advisory Board?

Sharing knowledge is at the heart of the Advisory Board interaction. Companies can shape their future research programmes based on expert opinion. Understanding how a medicine fits into the patient pathway can help companies provide the right information, education and training, to support the introduction of a new medicine, to ensure the best outcomes for patients. Clinicians can benefit from sharing ideas with colleagues, or through building their own understanding of the science behind new treatments. Patients are the ultimate beneficiaries of this information exchange, profiting from new medicines that meet their healthcare needs.

What are the rules governing the use and running of Advisory Boards?

The relationship between industry and health professionals is very well regulated. All interactions with HCPs are governed by EU Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code relating to medicinal products for human use, the EFPIA HCP Code, as well as applicable EFPIA Member Associations' national codes and any other applicable (local) internal policies, procedures and laws. In addition to complying with laws, regulations and codes of practice, companies will often have their own guiding principles to which they adhere. For example, these may include: establishing a clearly-defined purpose; providing transparency of the documentation; and reporting outcomes of the Advisory Boards. They may also incorporate rules on who attends from the company – such as no sales representatives – and introduce strict criteria for the selection of Advisory Board members, based on expertise.

Participation in Advisory Boards requires an investment of time and expertise from HCPs, over and above their principle practice. Therefore it is appropriate that they are paid for their time and reimbursed for expenses such as travel. Remuneration must be part of a written agreement, be in line with fair market value and comply with relevant Code of Practice, regulations and laws.

A new era of transparency

In June 2016, companies will begin publicly disclosing payments made to health professionals for activities such as Advisory Boards, speaking at meetings, consultancy, travel and accommodation. The remuneration of HCPs and HCOs for participation in these advisory boards will be disclosed in the categories Fees for the remuneration and Related expenses for the travel and accommodation, if any. Bringing greater transparency to this, already well-regulated, vital relationship is about strengthening the basis for collaboration in the future. Industry is being proactive, based on its commitment to this relationship.

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