



Executive Summary

Focusing on Responsibility: Reframing the Healthcare Industry’s Marketing Relationships

Introduction

Several factors make it difficult for companies in the healthcare industry to work with medical societies. These factors—from the economy to public perception to internal politics—contribute to a rapidly changing environment for all parties involved. This convergence represents both a potential crisis and means to a solution.

Framing the Discussion

To date, discussion has been focused primarily on *accountability* measures, such as the enhanced PhRMA and AdvaMed codes. While well-intentioned and justified, these measures focus primarily on what *not* to do. This approach ignores the more complex topic of *responsibility*—establishing principles for what industry alliances *should* aspire to achieve. By addressing both topics, medical societies can generate powerful results and keep their integrity.

Crafting Solutions

Organizations now face a critical choice in dealing with industry: detach or engage. Some would give up industry relationships altogether rather than dedicate the time and resources necessary to develop a solution. This is a lost opportunity. Instead IEG proposes the medical societies implement a two-pronged solution for engagement:

Guidelines for Developing Industry Alliances

Interested parties—associations, industry, legislators, groups of concerned physicians—should undertake research to inform a set of working guidelines for industry alliances. Areas of inquiry should include:

- Establishing roles and responsibilities for relevant decisionmakers
- Gauging the relevance of alliances to professionals’ practice or patient care

- Determining whether alliances are in the patient’s best interest
- Understanding the impact on credibility—for associations, industry and professionals
- Identifying and coping with potential bias
- Defining appropriate access granted by industry alliances

In addition to these guidelines, the associations must also work to make alliances measurable. Too often all parties involved are left to wonder what a logo on a conference attendee badge or tote bag accomplishes. Such uncertainty only encourages misperceptions and inhibits the potential of more meaningful alliances. By connecting alliance activities directly with shared goals—from improving outcomes to advancing research in a specified area—associations can prioritize their own efforts and weed out irrelevant excess.

Criteria for Practitioners and Patients to Assess Industry Alliances

Industry and associations must also address the concern that alliances threaten patient trust in organizations and individual practitioners. IEG proposes a coordinated information campaign about these alliances. Critical issues to be addressed in this strategy include:

- Transparency and disclosure of alliances
- Resolution of conflicts of interests
- Relevance of alliances to the profession and/or the patient

Such an effort would allow practitioners and patients alike to make objective, informed evaluations of industry relationships.

Conclusion

A commitment to responsibility and best-in-class methods will elevate industry alliances beyond the current fray. Doing so will allow industry, associations and practitioners to get back to the shared work of improving patients’ lives around the world.