

Guidelines on working with funders and sponsors



1. Introduction

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the professional membership body for general practitioners in the UK and is a registered charity. Its aim is to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the 'voice' of general practitioners on education, training and standards issues. RCGP relies on its reputation for independence, impartiality and a commitment to the highest standards of patient care. RCGP recognizes that accepting funding from external organisations for core College activity and from pharmaceutical companies in particular is something that needs to be approached with caution.

The purpose of this document is to provide clear guidance on how RCGP should work with the pharmaceutical and other industries in the best interests of the College. It sets out the principles on which decisions about funding opportunities should be based although RCGP will look at each relationship individually.

Sponsorship is defined as funding from an external source relating to one of these specific activities:

- Sponsorship packages and exhibition stands at RCGP conferences and events
- Funding and sponsorship of awards
- Adverts within RCGP publications and on RCGP websites
- Research project funding
- Funding for specific sponsor led or RCGP led material, including events (both virtual and in person) and eLearning.

Funding that is derived from contracts with central government, or government agencies including but not limited to the Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England & Improvement, Health Education England, NHS Digital and Integrated Care Systems (ICs), will not be classed as sponsorship for the purposes of this policy unless related to specific RCGP led events.

This guidance applies to all College activities (including international work) and meetings including those of departments across the Directorates, Faculties, Devolved Councils, Clinical Networks, Projects, any networks facilitated by the College and any sub-groups thereof. The guidance does not include donations which is covered by the Donations Policy. Whilst the commercial operations of 30 Euston Square, operated through RCGP Enterprise is not seen as a sponsorship activity, these activities will follow the guidelines set out within section 2.

2. Context

RCGP works with a wide range of companies with an interest in primary care, whilst always maintaining its independence. We believe it is important to maintain co-operative relationships with companies that manufacture, provide and market products and services for use within or applicable to the field of primary care. We maintain relationships with a wide range of companies and are not reliant on a single one.

- 2.1 It is imperative that the high-quality information and services provided by RCGP to our membership is not unduly influenced by acceptance of sponsorship. The College will withdraw from any initiative that risks jeopardising this stance.
- 2.2 RCGP will not embark on, or continue with, any sponsorship arrangement or collaborative venture which might damage its reputation.
- 2.3 RCGP does not accept any sponsorship relating to bottle feeding or 'formula' infant nutrition.
- 2.4 RCGP will not knowingly accept money from companies whose activities generate more than 10% of revenues from the manufacture of arms, alcohol, tobacco, adult entertainment services or gambling-related business activities on ethical grounds, and this includes related charitable trusts.
- 2.5 RCGP does not accept any sponsorship from oil, gas or coal producers or mining companies on ethical grounds due to the climate emergency and our sustainability agenda.
- 2.6 RCGP reserves the right to refuse any promotion/sponsorship arrangement which it feels would not be in keeping with the College's position as a registered Charity seeking to improve the quality of general practice medicine. External organisations securing sponsorship on our behalf must seek approval from the College prior to an offer being confirmed.

Difficulties have arisen in connection with services such as acupuncture, herbal remedies and food substances. The general principle is that the RCGP is unlikely to accept advertisements for medical or paramedical services for which there is little scientific evidence of effectiveness. Research trials and evidence will be required. The College values an evidence-based approach to medicine.

3. Transparency

From the beginning of the April 2023-4 Financial Year a list of all College sponsors (other than donations) should be published annually on the College's website. Wherever possible and subject to any contractual and data handling restrictions that may exist information on the financial bandwidths of sponsorship funding will also be included.

4. Relationships between RCGP and the pharmaceutical industry

- 4.1 Relationships between RCGP and individual pharmaceutical companies can and should be based upon a principle of partnership working.
- 4.2 Each party should recognise that successful partnerships are those where both partners benefit, and each should seek to understand the internal culture of, and external pressures on, the other.
- 4.3 RCGP accepts financial support from pharmaceutical companies and groups of companies on the following conditions:
 - There are strong grounds for believing it will result in benefit to RCGP members and primary care patients.
 - The College is satisfied that accepting such support does not adversely affect the independent status/reputation of the organization.
 - The College believes that accepting such support falls within the guidelines of the Charity Commission
 - There is no attempt on the part of the company or companies to influence RCGP policy or actions explicitly or implicitly.
- 4.4 Initial approaches to or from potential sponsors, including commercial, biomedical companies or other organisations, should be referred to the Senior Commercial Manager in the Membership, Development and Education Directorate, or – for research project funding – the Head of Research and Innovation.
- 4.5 Any officers and staff with a paid/contractual relationship or conflict of interest with a commercial or potential partnership organisation must inform, in writing, the Executive Director of Membership Development and Education and Assistant Director of Governance.

5. Guidelines for working together

- 5.1 RCGP will retain full editorial control over all publications and printed materials sponsored by any company or companies and will maintain copyright.

- 5.2 Where sponsorship for an event or conference includes a speaking slot at the conference then the organising group or RCGP representative have editorial control. The session proposed by the sponsor must not be a promotional session and the outline and content will be quality assured by the RCGP.
- 5.3 RCGP must be consulted wherever and whenever its name is used, for both internal and external communications. Approval from the Executive Director of Membership Development and Education or the Executive Director of Policy and Engagement (as applicable) or their designated deputy must be sought for any copy produced which refers to a RCGP initiative supported by a company.
- 5.4 RCGP's logo must not be used by companies without written approval beforehand from the College (please refer all enquiries to the Executive Director of Membership Development and Education in the first instance).
- 5.5 Press releases must not be issued by external organisations which refer to RCGP without the College's prior approval. Suggested quotes may be drafted but must not be used without agreement from Executive Director of Policy and Engagement or their designated deputy.
- 5.6 RCGP is happy to work with PR, advertising and marketing agencies employed by companies once a joint project is underway. However, during the planning stage of such a project, RCGP requires a representative from the company to be present as well as the agency.
- 5.7 Written agreements will be produced for each joint initiative between RCGP and a company, and formal contracts will be produced where required by law.
- 5.8 A company's support will be acknowledged appropriately following discussions with the company concerned.

6. For members of the ABPI

- 6.1 For member companies of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) such partnership arrangements should comply with the ABPI Code of Practice.
- 6.2 Where partnerships involve the pharmaceutical industry and related commercial sector then the proposed arrangement must comply with the Human Medicine Regulations 2014 and any further relevant legislation, regulations, or official code of practice.

Notes

The definition of a partnership does not apply to personal gifts of less than £100 per gift e.g. gifts of post-it pads, pens etc. However, gifts should be declared if several small gifts worth a total of £100 are received from the same or closely related source in a 12-month period. (Note, the ABPI Code of Practice (5) permits the provision of a promotional aid, which costs the donor company no more than £6 plus VAT).