



ISSOP

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY for
SOCIAL PEDIATRICS and CHILD HEALTH

Paediatricians call on baby feeding industry to stop sponsorship of medical education

Conflict of interest is damaging to support of breastfeeding

GENEVA, 15 May 2014 - An international body of paediatricians and other health care professionals today called on the baby feeding industry, including infant formula manufacturers, to end the sponsorship of medical education.

The International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health (ISSOP) says sponsorship damages the health of mothers and infants, and subtly portrays breastfeeding as a fringe practice. In addition, the sponsorship of pediatrician training also results in doctors who are ambivalent toward the practice.

Evidence shows that optimal breastfeeding of children under two years of age could prevent over 800,000 deaths (13 per cent of all deaths) in children under five in the developing world (Lancet 2013). Yet global rates of breastfeeding rates have remained stagnant since 1990, with only 36 per cent of children less than six months exclusively breastfed in 2012.

“The baby food industry knows exactly how to influence medical practice, and it is through sponsorships, whether from funding of paediatric education and training, research, meetings and professional journals, to booklets and leaflets given out at discharge or paediatric clinics,” said Dr. Tony Waterston, of the International Society for Social Pediatrics

and Child Health. “The baby food industry shows complete disregard for the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.”

In a public statement issued in April, the ISSOP explains how the baby feeding industry’s lack of compliance with the Code benefits companies:

“Sponsorship by its nature creates a conflict of interest. Whether it takes the form of gift items, meals, or help with conference expenses, it creates a sense of obligation and a need to reciprocate in some way. The ‘gift relationship’ thus influences our attitude to the company and its products and leads to an unconscious unwillingness to think or speak ill of them.”

Two United Nations organizations also welcome the call as a necessary measure if mothers and their families are to choose mothers milk as the best food for their babies.

“Globally breastfeeding promotes child survival, health and development,” said Dr. Chessa Lutter, senior advisor, Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization. “Pediatricians have an ethical and moral responsibility to help and support mothers to breastfeed and avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest.”

UNICEF is concerned that globally roughly two out of five infants less than six months of age are exclusively breastfed. And mothers don’t breastfeed because of misperceptions about insufficient milk supply, inability to breastfeed, the return to work, and promotion of breastmilk substitutes.

“Medical practitioners and paediatricians in particular play an important role in supporting mothers to initiate and continue breastfeeding as long as possible,” said Dr. France Begin, UNICEF senior advisor on nutrition. “For mothers and families to make an informed choice, they have to be provided with unbiased information, free from commercial influence – we

must not let lobbies interfere between a mother and her baby's wellbeing. This is a harmful conflict of interest that has consequences on the lives of millions of children.”

The statement recommends that national paediatric societies take these issues seriously and take steps to end all sponsorship by the baby feeding industry, while ensuring that effective and independently funded educational programmes that protect, support and promote breastfeeding are included in all paediatric curricula.

Political commitment is essential to strong, sustainable global and national advocacy for breastfeeding.’

“ISSOP is committed to promoting child health globally and breast feeding promotion is important to that commitment,” said Prof Nick Spencer, President of ISSOP. “The interest of the baby feeding Industry is to maximize their profits from the sale of breast milk substitutes.”

“Sponsorship from the Industry of paediatric education and conferences inevitably compromises the duty of paediatricians and other child health professionals to promote breast feeding.”

Notes for editors

The position statement can be accessed in full at http://issop.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=2:essop-position-statements&Itemid=18

ISSOP is the International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health and further information is available on its website www.issop.org