

Pharmaceutical Industry Sponsorship

Issue

Community Organisations in Australia facing the challenges of HIV/AIDS historically do so unfunded, partially or fully funded through grants from the State/Territory and or Commonwealth Health Departments, or are reliant on their own fund raising abilities. In the last several years, pharmaceutical companies developing or marketing HIV related drugs have begun to offer/negotiate with several HIV/AIDS organisations including AFAO around funding of certain aspects of the work of community based organisations (usually in the area of treatments). There are some common community perceptions that these companies are ruled by self interest, and that there is very little benefit to community organisations in taking drug company sponsorship.

These perceptions about drug company sponsorship of activities of community based organisations may potentially impact negatively on the services, projects and resources that are funded by pharmaceutical companies. On the other hand, a number of events and projects have been conducted in recent years using grants from pharmaceutical companies, without attracting any criticism. There does appear to be increasing acceptance within the community about use of pharmaceutical company funding, particularly as government funding for HIV/AIDS is not likely to increase.

There are several examples of drug company sponsorship that have clearly been of benefit to affected communities. These are the Positive Living insert, the "Men Like Us" campaign, and funding for Australian delegates to attend significant international conferences. All these projects are occurring or have occurred with no interference from the drug company sponsoring them. The successful Treatments Officers Network (TON) would not be possible without drug company sponsorship.

In the USA, most HIV organisations, including those specifically focusing on treatments, accept significant donations from pharmaceutical companies. This has not resulted in loss of effectiveness in lobbying the pharmaceutical industry regarding development of new treatments, conduct of clinical research, and early access to promising new treatments.

Discussion

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (AFAO's primary funder) has indicated to AFAO that it expects resources like the National AIDS Bulletin (NAB) to move consistently towards self funding. In the Commonwealth's view, a significant shift towards self funding is expected, and while AFAO is attempting to increase income from subscriptions, drug company advertising is another obvious source of funds.

In addition, growing demands placed upon other AFAO projects, without an increase in Commonwealth funding, have to increased AFAO's need to obtain external funds wherever



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possible and appropriate. Governments have historically found it difficult to fund campaigns that use explicit materials or involve experimental treatment drugs. Advocacy is another important area of AFAO's work that attracts little government funding.

With the fast changing treatments environment, there is an increased need for accurate and accessible treatments information for positive people across Australia. Resources need to include new information, be more detailed and be updated more regularly. The past year has seen the development by AFAO of two new treatments booklets, updating of the recorded 1800 HIV Health Information Line, the emergence of *Positive Living* as a national publication and a revamped, more accessible and more comprehensive *HIV Herald*.

This increased response to HIV information needs could not have been funded within the existing AFAO budget, and was made possible in some cases by contributions from drug companies.

Funding from any source, including from government, potentially raises questions of influence over the direction of projects and activities. The challenge for any organisation is to put in place appropriate checks and balances to prevent this from occurring.

If the community AIDS sectors comes to depend more on funding from pharmaceutical companies, the more critical it becomes to demonstrate that the relationships are strictly "hands off". Transparent pharmaceutical industry-Community Based Organisation relationships are crucial for affected communities and the broader public, who depend upon the accuracy and independence of treatments publications, and for employees to ensure that their interactions with the pharmaceutical industry are conducted in a way that does not compromise the integrity of their work.

Any decision to accept pharmaceutical company sponsorship should be based on an individual case by case assessment. AFAO expresses a preference for sponsorship from a range of pharmaceutical companies rather than any individual company, although it is noted that this will not always be possible.

In accepting pharmaceutical company sponsorship, AFAO requires that certain conditions be met. Only if **all** the conditions are met will AFAO accept pharmaceutical company sponsorship. These are the guiding principles for pharmaceutical company sponsorship of community based initiatives.

Guiding Principles

1. The Relationship Between Pharmaceutical Drug Company Sponsorship and Government Funding

AFAO will accept drug company sponsorship only if:

- government funding is unlikely; or
- government funding is inadequate; or
- government funding would take too long to obtain.

2. Conceptualisation, *then* Funding

Decisions to accept pharmaceutical company sponsorship should be based on a case by case assessment, with the strategic value of the activity to be funded carefully assessed. Negotiations should only be entered into with pharmaceutical companies where projects are fully conceptualised or pre project assessment has been completed. Negotiations will only be undertaken following approval by the AFAO executive director.

3. Contracts

Where a decision is made to accept funds from a pharmaceutical company, it should be made clear to the donor (in writing) that the funds are accepted on the basis that the donor will have no input into the production of a publication or management/direction of a project or management/direction of a staff position. The same principles of independence and autonomy that shape project funds also relate to staff employed using pharmaceutical company money. In other words, the only acceptable pharmaceutical industry funding will always be “unrestricted” grants.

4. Liaison between AFAO staff and Pharmaceutical Industry Representatives

To ensure that any employees who have direct dealings with representatives from the pharmaceutical industry engage in business-like and transparent relationships at all times, and do not gain directly or indirectly from their interactions, a code of conduct will be adhered to. Adherence to this code of conduct will be monitored by the AFAO Executive Director. The code specifies that:

- Invitations to participate in pharmaceutical industry sponsored events which are issued to individual employees be ratified by the AFAO Executive Director or Deputy Director prior to acceptance
- Employees attending individual information sessions report back, and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner
- Lodgings and per diem payments paid for by pharmaceutical companies will be generally consistent with the standards of AFAO
- Information supplied by drug companies be checked with an independent expert prior to publication in any form
- Pharmaceutical sponsorship for attending conferences be administered by AFAO, rather than the pharmaceutical company deciding which individuals to sponsor
- Any interaction between an employee and the sponsoring company be open to scrutiny by AFAO management.

4. Acknowledgment and Transparency

Where a project or publication is undertaken through full or part pharmaceutical company funding, this must always be publicly acknowledged. (in the case of a publication, this should be done by including the words “this publication is supported/made possible by an unrestricted grant from.....”. Another example, NAPWA Treatments Roadshow- at presentations to PLWHA, it should always be stated that “this presentation is made possible by an unrestricted grant from Glaxo Wellcome, but that company had no input into the content or format of this presentation”.

5. Editorial Influence

Drug company sponsorship must be free of any pharmaceutical company editorial influence. This condition has always been readily accepted by drug companies in their dealings with AFAO.

6. Criticism of Treatment Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies

AFAO clearly states when negotiating drug company sponsorship that in accepting sponsorship, there can be no impact on the organisation's preparedness to voice criticism of particular HIV drugs and their manufacturers. AFAO publications are often critical of pharmaceutical companies and their products, and particularly of company attitudes to providing compassionate access to drugs. AFAO will continue to provide the most accurate and critically analysed information on new allopathic and complementary therapies so that positive people may make informed treatment decisions.

7. Promotion of Choice

AFAO requires that sponsorship be accepted within the context of our commitment to providing information about allopathic and complementary interventions. While the manufacturers of complementary treatments are not prominent among sponsors of AFAO resources, AFAO is committed to providing information to consumers on alternative and complementary therapies, and these are addressed through AFAO publications on a regular basis.

8. Accepting Gifts and Gratuities

Gifts and gratuities should only be accepted subject to approval by the AFAO Executive Director when the gift/gratuity is offered to an AFAO employee. The AFAO President will make decisions about gifts and gratuities that are offered to members of the AFAO Executive.

The guiding principle should be that acceptance of gifts is appropriate only when there is a benefit to the organisation, AFAO members or our broader HIV constituency.

9. Review

Review and ongoing evaluation of pharmaceutical drug company sponsored projects and programs, as with all AFAO projects, will be undertaken. Continuance of pharmaceutical company sponsored projects should be based on regular favourable review and evaluation.