The pharmaceutical industry has a contribution to make to evidence-based healthcare

A letter published in the 14 October 2011 issue of the NZMJ entitled A policy of no pharmaceutical industry sponsorship: a case for health equity states the opinion “we believe that there are no workable models to balance ethical, education and commercial demands”. This extreme view is unlikely to allow for the best use of the resources and capabilities that each group involved in delivering healthcare has to offer.

We believe that avoiding interaction with the industry that develops some of the health professions most effective (and cost-effective) tools is not tenable. The pharmaceutical industry strives to develop an exceptionally high standard of evidence for the medicines on which doctors rely to achieve health benefits for their patients. There is no other industry that spends as much resource and time on ensuring a product is capable of achieving the claims made about it, with products taking up to 15 years in development to meet international regulatory standards.

Regulators (e.g. Medsafe) and funders (PHARMAC) recognise that the industry is the primary holder of the information essential to the evidence-based use of their medicines. These agencies expect a very high standard of evidence to be developed and presented to them in applications for registration and funding; and rely on the industry to do this.

The industry, in discussion with regulators and other stakeholders has generated substantial self regulatory processes that provide checks and balances to ensure the integrity of evidence development and marketing based on this evidence. Yes, there have been examples of people and companies involved in unacceptable practices, as with any human endeavour, but the broader industry works hard to ensure its practices are highly ethical and constantly improved.

The industry strives to provide balanced information to clinicians because the financial sustainability of the industry depends on being recognised as a credible source of prescribing information. There are also built-in incentives for industry self regulation to work, and competitors actively monitor and respond to any marketing that is deemed inappropriate. The Medicines New Zealand Code of Practice (Edition 15 available on our website: http://www.medicinesnz.co.nz) has recently been updated to incorporate international moves towards increasingly robust self regulation.

New Zealand Medical Association’s Consensus Statement on the Role of the Doctor in New Zealand describes a need for doctors to “advocate for the patient and advise about all treatment options”. We believe that it is not possible for this to be achieved without being fully informed about the treatment options available. It is also not adequate to rely on PHARMAC to provide information or advice about all treatment options, clinicians must have access to the information that companies are best placed to provide.
We strongly believe that the pharmaceutical industry is a legitimate partner to clinicians and other stakeholders in delivering the optimal healthcare to New Zealand patients.

**Disclosure:** I am employed by Medicines New Zealand, a membership organisation for the research-based pharmaceutical companies providing medicines to New Zealand.

Kevin Sheehy  
General Manager  
Medicines New Zealand  
Wellington

**References:**
