

Newsletter

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Editorial

Say No to Sponsorships



Value of breastfeeding is well known, getting more and more recognized, particularly the role of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months in ensuring young child survival, health and development. However, unethical or sometimes illegal promotion of baby foods by baby food manufacturers continues to undermine this natural practice

That commercial marketing of baby foods undermines breastfeeding was recognised as early as 1979 when first global meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding was called by the UNICEF and WHO. The World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions 49.15 (1996) and 58.32 (2005) urge member states to ensure that financial support and other incentives for programs and health professionals working in infant and young child health do not create conflicts of interest. The verdict of WHA is clear, sound and ethical. It is for us and governments to take it forward. Role of health workers is very critical.

Health professionals (doctors and nurses), healthcare institutions and their associations or organisations play a significant role in imparting information on infant feeding to mothers and families. Companies manufacturing baby foods, feeding bottles and teats have been using the health care system as promotional channel through sponsorships. As all companies are profit-making bodies, their every action is meant for making profits. Sales of their products rise with the endorsement of the health care system. Any sponsorship of the health care system thus becomes a clear case of 'conflict of interest'.

Some governments have set examples by providing the sponsorship clause in their national legislations; this has been achieved as a follow up of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. For example, Ghana, Botswana and India have clearly included in their respective national legislations to ban all kind of sponsorships of health care workers or their associations by the baby food companies. They have all done it differently but definitely. Ban exists on fellowships, research grants sponsoring conferences/seminars, gifts in kind or cash, direct or indirect financial inducements, contests, and research work etc.

This action gives me enough inspiration to call upon all governments, NGOs, Civil Society Groups, UN and donor agencies, health professionals and their associations in the Asia Pacific region to ensure that child health programmes are free from commercial interests. Go ahead and create new legislations or include this issue of sponsorship in the existing ones. Governments are also requested to stay away from partnerships with baby food manufacturers in implementing any programmes on child health, particularly infant and young child feeding. The WHA Resolution 58.32 provides good hope for better infant health, development and survival in the coming years!

Let's make it happen!

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