

Dear Sirs,

I read with interest the open letter to the GMC regarding the development of a central registry for doctors. (*Why the GMC should set up a central registry of doctors' competing interests, 15 January*). Transparency of financial relationships between industry and healthcare professionals has been an important priority for the ABPI, and the call for action to the GMC comes at a crucial point in light of our work on this issue.

Collaborative working between healthcare professionals and commercial organisations across the life sciences sector has long been a positive driver for advancements in patient care and the progression of modern medicine. Fees are paid to healthcare professionals to reimburse them for their time and expertise. To help ensure these relationships are transparent and meet the high expectations of stakeholders, a decision was taken by industry in 2010 to disclose aggregate payments from 2012.

Last year, ABPI member companies agreed, as part of amendments to the ABPI Code of Practice, to disclose payments to individually named healthcare professionals, including consultancy services such as speaking and sponsorship to attend medical education meetings. This will come into effect in 2016, and is enshrined in the EFPIA Disclosure Code which has been adopted across 33 European countries.

In 2013, a consultation was conducted to identify in principle whether there would be support from the healthcare professional community for a centrally-hosted single searchable database, with a proactive role for healthcare professionals in validating and submitting financial information. The overwhelming majority of respondents, including representatives of the leading healthcare professional bodies and over 1,000 individual healthcare professionals agreed that payments should be transparent and publicly declared (90%), and that healthcare professionals should have a role to play in making this happen (77%). The results were reported in the BMJ last October.

The next important question is how such information should be made publicly available, this is where the BMJ letter calling for a central registry from the GMC is a timely addition to the debate. The ABPI Board agreed in December 2013 to lead on developing a publicly available central registry for disclosures. We want to do this in partnership with the medical community, and our next step is to host a multi-stakeholder event in early Spring to discuss the role of healthcare professional groups and bodies. I hope the GMC, and other stakeholders take up this unique opportunity to engage in discussion about how we can coordinate efforts so that we can develop a robust registry that meets the expectations and needs of healthcare professionals, industry, the wider public and, most importantly, patients.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Whitehead

Chief Executive Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry