

BSR Policy on Relationships with the Pharmaceutical Industry

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy represents the British Society for Rheumatology's corporate position on relations with the pharmaceutical industry (PI) and other organisations with a commercial interest. Its main premise is as follows:

'That the BSR, in its relationships with the pharmaceutical industry, operates with the highest ethical standards and wishes for all its financial arrangements with industry to be clearly defined, recorded and transparent.'

Although this policy makes particular reference to the pharmaceutical industry due to the unique relationship between health professionals and these companies, the principles of the policy apply equally to any relationship between the BSR and any organisation with a commercial interest.

It is vital that the trustees, officers and staff of the BSR are operating within an agreed code of practice. When the BSR is, for example, producing guidelines or asked to be involved in a NICE consultation on a particular drug therapy, our membership, external organisations and the public at large need to feel confident that opinions given by the BSR are independent and in the best interests of those who are administering and receiving treatments. They also need to feel sure that decisions have been made without any undue influence from the pharmaceutical industry or its representatives.

It is sometimes necessary for the BSR to raise funds and to invite contributions from commercial businesses in order to carry out elements of its work. The pharmaceutical industry is a potential source of that income for certain projects and in some cases its involvement in BSR projects is appropriate, for example the setting up of the BSR Biologics Register.

The policy will be reviewed each year and changed as necessary.

Decision making

Areas of policy that need clarifying or require a decision need to be referred to the appropriate people within BSR.

The following sets out this decision-making line, and is called the decision matrix throughout the document.

For routine enquiries and advice on policy implementation contact:

The Head of External & Clinical Affairs, who will work with the Hon. Secretary

If the decision requires further input, it will be referred to the President and Chief Executive.

For decisions concerning the Journal or the BSRBR, the Honorary Editor and Chair of the BSRBR steering committee will be consulted.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Relationships with pharmaceutical companies

The BSR will:

- 2.1.1** Maintain co-operative relationships with commercial organisations which develop, manufacture or market medicines and other treatments in the interests of our membership and their patients.
- 2.1.2** Foster ethical, professional relationships between rheumatologists, allied health professionals and commercial organisations which develop, manufacture or market medicines and other treatments, whose decisions will affect the treatments that the above groups can offer to patients.
- 2.1.3** Ensure that such relationships are based on equal partnerships.
- 2.1.4** Only accept support which is in the interests of furthering the development of epidemiological, clinical or scientific knowledge, or improving education and information available about arthritis and related conditions.
- 2.1.5** Base funding, sponsorship or advertising agreements with commercial organisations on written agreements, whether or not this is required by law.

The BSR will not:

- 2.1.6** Allow its good reputation, independence or charitable status to be compromised by its relationship with any commercial organisation and will reject funding, sponsorship or any relationship that would or might be perceived to do so.
- 2.1.7** Engage in the endorsement, marketing or promotion of a company specific brand name product.

2.2 Funding

The BSR will:

- 2.2.1** Wherever possible, seek funding for projects on the basis of a consortia approach, requesting support from two or more companies in the same industry. The BSR will negotiate actual contributions with all interested companies on an individual and project-by-project basis. However, the BSR will at all times ensure that no one party has an unequal influence on the objectives or outcomes of any project. In practice this may mean that

for conference or journal related activity there may be an individual sponsor for an individual event e.g. a prize, but a range of different events will be available for sponsorship.

- 2.2.2** Publish a full summary of financial contributions from commercial sources in its annual report and openly declare commercial sponsorship of a project where relevant in any public relations or media work. The BSR will ensure that companies who are providing sponsorship are aware of this at the outset.

The BSR will not:

- 2.2.3** Undertake any initiative that contravenes the policies of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), Association of Medical Research Charities or guidelines produced by the Medical Research Council and the Royal College of Physicians.
- 2.2.4** Seek or accept any industry funding for its direct governance activities which include: the BSR AGM business meeting; all meetings of the Executive and Council; all standing committee meetings and meetings of any subgroups of standing committees.
- 2.2.5** Seek or accept industry funding for any of its work in producing clinical guidelines.

The BSR will accept funding from pharmaceutical companies and other commercial organisations only on the following conditions:

- 2.2.6** All staff, trustees and officers of the Society and members of standing committees must consult via the decision matrix before entering into any formal negotiations to raise funds for or on behalf of the BSR.
- 2.2.7** Special interest groups and those arranging BSR education courses must consult with the Heberden Committee and Education & Training Committee respectively before entering into any formal negotiations to raise funds for or on behalf of the BSR.
- 2.2.8** There must be strong grounds for belief that seeking funding for a particular project is in the interests of furthering the development of epidemiological, clinical or scientific knowledge, or improving education and information about arthritis and related conditions. The final decision will be reached via the decision matrix and 'where necessary' the views of Council may be sought by them.
- 2.2.9** The Chief Executive and Head of External & Clinical Affairs must be satisfied that no adverse publicity could reasonably be expected to accrue from accepting the funds and must, if they are uncertain about this, refer to the Executive Committee before accepting.
- 2.2.10** Where agreement is reached to proceed with negotiations, the Chief Executive must be kept fully up to date on progress and his/her advice sought in drawing up a suitable written agreement.
- 2.2.11** Any written agreement must be agreed upon and signed off by the Chief Executive, and the Society's Treasurer and Finance & General Purposes Committee must be duly informed of this agreement's existence.

- 2.2.12** There must be no attempt on the part of the funder to coerce or influence the BSR's policy or actions in any way, either explicitly or implicitly. Trustees, officers and staff should pass on details of behaviour of this nature by any company representative to the BSR's Head of External & Clinical Affairs as soon as possible. Such information, if confirmed, will lead to the termination of any agreement reached thus far.
- 2.2.13** The BSR's good name is its most valuable asset. Both charity law and agreed best practice preclude the exploitation of a charity's name for any non-charitable purpose. The BSR's name must not in any circumstances be used to imply approval or endorsement of any of the donor's products or related policies.

2.3 Product endorsement

The BSR:

- 2.3.1** Supports the availability of the widest possible range of effective treatments for arthritis and related conditions.
- 2.3.2** Supports the principle that those products should be available to patients on the basis of clinical need, with reference to the appropriate guidelines and standards of care.
- 2.3.3** Will, whenever communicating about drugs or therapies with BSR members (e.g. in BSR guidelines, publications etc), encourage the use of either a scientific name, therapeutic class or the several different brand names available; the same will apply to illustrations. It may not be practicable to mention every brand name at every stage in a publication but the overall effect should be one of impartiality.
- 2.3.4** Will conduct independent work for guidelines and will make requests for any information that it sees fit to review as part of that work. The BSR's name must not in any circumstances be used to imply approval or endorsement of any of the donor's products or related policies.

The BSR will not:

- 2.3.5** Endorse individual products.
- 2.3.6** Accept or hold unsolicited dossiers of information on a particular brand product at its head office.

2.4 Literature and other endorsements

The BSR will not:

- 2.4.1** Endorse any literature or other items that promotes any individual product.
- 2.4.2** Endorse any documentation where the data included is not backed by valid research.
- 2.4.3** Endorse any literature that seeks to sensationalise musculoskeletal conditions and which provokes a disproportionate reaction by the public.
- 2.4.4** Endorse any document that does not meet the Plain English Crystal Mark standard.

3. POLICY & INFLUENCING

The BSR works with organisations such as the National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE) to help develop and influence public policy on behalf of people with musculoskeletal conditions. It is important to ensure that BSR is seen as an independent commentator in these areas. We do work with a number of organisations who do receive industry funding, while we cannot govern other organisations policies, we will seek to ensure that they are aware of our position.

Therefore the BSR will not:

- 3.1.1.** Discuss any consultation submissions it makes with PI.
- 3.1.2.** Share the contents of any BSR documents with PI.
- 3.1.3.** Accept unsolicited copies of industry submission to outside consultations.
- 3.1.4.** Accept specific funding for any work in this area.

4. MEMBERS' CONDUCT

All officers of the Society, and members of standing committees and subcommittees, should declare any interests and register any actual or potential conflicts of interest each year. Members have a responsibility to update their submission, in writing, during the year if their circumstances change. Convenors of special interest groups and education courses are also asked to declare and register their interests and should refer to specific BSR guidelines relating to education and events for a full explanation and further instructions.

4.1 Interests that should be declared

- Current or recent sponsorship by a commercial organisation for any purpose – education, research, attending meetings or conferences etc.
- Commercial or financial interest in a product (e.g. including shares in the manufacturing organisation).
- Sponsorship or major grants to a unit in which the member works.
- Membership of a pharmaceutical company advisory board, currently or in the last 3 years.

The records of these forms will be held at head office and a new form will be sent to all newly elected officers or standing committee members. Forms should then be updated on an annual basis.

The BSR President, members of the Executive Committee, and chairs of BSR standing committees, BSRBR steering committee chair and Hon. Editor of the journal are requested to step down from pharmaceutical industry advisory boards during their term of office. BSR Trustees are also governed by the Trustees Code

of Conduct in relation to accepting industry sponsorship for events. However, for ordinary members of standing committees and subcommittees a declared conflict of interest will not necessarily preclude a member from holding office. Where any officer or committee member is considering engaging in activities where a potentially serious conflict of interest might exist, they should discuss this with the President before updating the register of interests. In extreme circumstances it might be necessary to request that an individual resigns from office if they intend to be involved in an activity that might compromise the Society's good reputation, independence or charitable status in any way.

In addition to this policy statement, specific guidelines in relation to the BSR's Corporate Partnership Scheme should be referred to for further information and guidance.

This policy relates to the activities of the staff, trustees, officers and committee members of the Society and does not govern the day to day activities of the BSR's general membership.

**BSR Executive Committee
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