



# Policy statement

## Working with pharmaceutical companies

### Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the circumstances under which the BHF will and will not work with pharmaceutical companies. The BHF is the leading independent source of heart health advice in the UK, and the largest non-commercial funder of cardiovascular research. We are also an independent voice for heart patients. The BHF is dependent on donations from individuals, corporate supporters and charitable foundations to fund our work but our financial relationships are always assessed in line with our mission.

### Policy statement

The British Heart Foundation does not have corporate partnerships with individual pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers. Such partnerships could create the impression that the British Heart Foundation was biased toward that company and would impact on our reputation as the leading independent source of heart health information.

We do not enter into campaigning coalitions or public policy activity including or funded by pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers. Such alliances could undermine our role as an independent voice for heart patients.

The BHF will consider corporate partnerships or campaigning coalitions with a group of pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers through, for example, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry or the Association of British Healthcare Industries. This would require acknowledgment (and use of logos) of the companies as an umbrella or group, rather than individual members of the group.

This policy does not preclude the BHF from funding researchers for clinical trials that are also being funded by one or more pharmaceutical companies.

On occasion, in pursuit of our mission, the BHF funds UK scientific meetings which are also co-funded by pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers. We will publish details of any such co-funded meetings on our website to ensure transparency. In addition, BHF staff may participate in UK and international scientific meetings which are funded by pharmaceutical companies.

We recognise that individuals who work for pharmaceutical or medical device manufacturers may wish to fundraise for the BHF. Any such funds raised by employees must be free from any association with the employer.

## Background

The relationship between health charities and pharmaceutical companies has come under close scrutiny in recent years. In 2006, the House of Commons Health Select Committee published a report on the influence of the pharmaceutical industry, which expressed concern that some companies may be acting against the public interest. In addition, the committee noted that relationships between patient groups and pharmaceutical companies may lead to demands for particular drugs that distort prescribing practice.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2008, the *Independent* newspaper undertook an investigation into patient groups who have been most powerfully lobbying NICE and concluded that they were being 'bankrolled' by pharmaceutical companies.<sup>2</sup> The article noted that patient groups had not called on drug companies to lower the prices of drugs to ease pressures on health spending, and that some smaller charities had failed to declare their association with pharmaceutical companies on their website.

### ***BHF funded research***

The BHF is the leading non-commercial funder of cardiovascular research in the UK. However, we have jointly funded research with pharmaceutical companies on occasion, for example the Heart Protection Study was jointly funded by the BHF, the Medical Research Council, Merck and Co and Roche Vitamins Ltd. Funding was provided as grants to Oxford University, so that the pharmaceutical sponsors had no say in how the money was spent, in the day-to-day running of the study, the analysis of the data, or the way the results were presented, published or publicised.<sup>3</sup> Many BHF researchers also receive separate funding from pharmaceutical companies.

### ***Scientific meetings***

The BHF currently contributes up to £3000 towards the cost of holding scientific meetings which we believe will further education and awareness of how best to tackle heart and circulatory disease. Applicants for such funding are required to detail other funders and these may include unrestricted educational grants from pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers. There is no association or relationship between the BHF and other funders of such meetings.

BHF staff may attend and participate in UK and international scientific meetings which further our organisational understanding of how best to tackle heart and circulatory disease. However, this attendance is never as part of a delegation paid for by pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers. Where financial contributions are made towards BHF attendance, these come from event organisers rather than sponsors.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmhealth/42/42.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/drug-firms-bankroll-attacks-on-nhs-947316.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/projects/hps/press-material/background-q-a/questions-and-answers-about-the-heart-protection-study>

### ***International models***

Both the National Heart Foundation of Australia and the American Heart Association operate 'Round Tables' with pharmaceutical industry members. These are formal alliances within which to share information and pursue common research goals. A major benefit is that, because all the major industry stakeholders can be involved, and the groups operate according to a transparent code or charter, the charities are less vulnerable to accusations of undue influence by one partner.

The Australian Heart Foundation Pharmaceutical Round Table comprises the Heart Foundation, Medicines Australia and twelve industry members.<sup>4</sup> It exists to support cardiovascular research and provides an opportunity for an ongoing exchange of ideas to help address the cardiovascular health of Australians. The Roundtable currently supports research to the value of \$3.3 million and is governed by a charter which includes the need to respect the Heart Foundation's independence.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, the American Heart Association (AHA) also leads a Pharmaceutical Round Table, which allows members to 'identify and pursue common objectives to improve cardiovascular health in the United States through research, patient education, and public and professional programs' Since its creation in 1988, the roundtable has contributed more than \$60million to cardiovascular research. There are ten industry members.<sup>6</sup>

For further information please email [policy@bhf.org.uk](mailto:policy@bhf.org.uk)

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Professional\\_Information/Research/Roundtable/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Professional_Information/Research/Roundtable/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/Heart%20Foundation%20Roundtable%20Charter%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2366>