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Collaboration between medical professionals and industry Revised guidelines published by the SAMS

There is a long tradition of collaboration between medical professionals and industry. This is essentially in the interests of good healthcare and contributes to medical progress. At the same time, it may lead to conflicts of interest. The Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) has updated and extended the scope of its guidelines on this topic: they are now no longer addressed exclusively to physicians but also to other health professions.

From an ethical perspective, it is essential that medical conduct should be guided by a concern for patient welfare and the interests of society, rather than being influenced by personal interest or conflicts of interest. The interests of individual actors in the health system frequently attract the attention of the media, giving rise to public debate and parliamentary motions.

The revised guidelines take account of recent developments in this area, covering for the first time virtual events, sales of advertising space, stand rental, and product and procedure training events, and also dealing with topics such as start-ups, spin-offs and licensing agreements.

Need for transparency and new funding models

In the view of the SAMS, transparency is indispensable if the credibility of medical professionals and the trust placed in them is to be maintained. That is the reason why the revised guidelines pay special attention to this issue. Transparency should not, however, lead to health professionals being pilloried because figures were taken out of context.

Physicians are accustomed to their continuing education events being sponsored by industry; indeed, no financial contributions are systematically provided either by cantons or hospitals – in contrast to events for nursing and other health professions. The absence of other possible sources of funding makes it all the more concerning that the medical profession should be criticised for its close links with industry. For a new, sustainable solution, political support will also be required.

Finally, it should be noted that guidelines can never offer solutions for every individual case. In practice, all parties are to apply and comply with the spirit of the guidelines to the best of their ability.

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