

Double Victory for breastfeeding

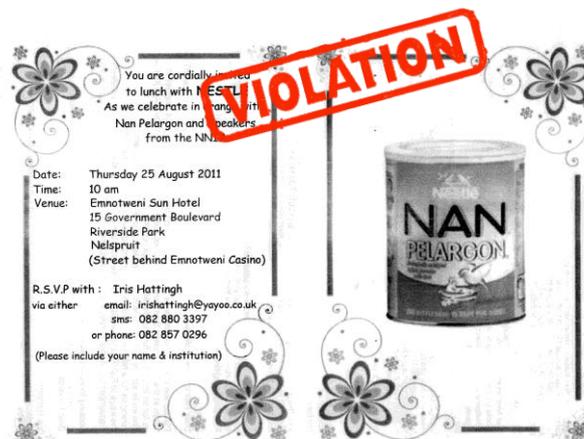
• Lunch got cancelled after complaint

A “fun event” for registered nurses and dieticians in South Africa got cancelled after invited participants raised the alarm. On 23 August, two days before a hotel in the Mpumalanga area was to welcome a “scientific” breakfast/lunch meeting, the local Nestle organiser was told to call it off.

The event was to “celebrate” an infant formula; colourful invitations, sporting a huge pack shot of the product, NAN-Pelargon, had been sent out far and wide. Dieticians and nurses were asked to bring more colleagues to the free meal.

Such events are not rare. Companies know they need the goodwill of maternal and child health personnel to promote their products. Meals in fancy hotels are an easy way to win the hearts and minds of health professionals. Everyone likes to be taken out to lunch and skip a day at work.

What was different this time was that some of them objected to being seduced. They sent the invitation to the regional IBFAN office which passed it on to ICDC, the International Code Documentation Centre. Realizing that here was a Code violation that could still be nipped in the bud, ICDC complained to Nestle headquarters and, surprisingly, within 24 hours, the order to cancel the event was sent to South Africa.



Moreover, the company headquarters said they would do a “full investigation and assessment and make sure this is an isolated incident. We will put into place actions to ensure that it doesn’t happen again.” This is one quick and positive action and hopefully a precedent for the future, not an exception that proves the rule. (ICDC still has a bitter memory of the company dismissing the bulk of its 2010 violations report. See ‘Rejoinder’ on ibfan.org website.)

• No more free formula

By coincidence (?), there was a two-day national Breastfeeding Consultative Meeting on 22 and 23 August, just prior to the Mpumalanga “fun event” and the Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, must have been alerted about it. On 23 August, he told the Consultative meeting that measures would be taken to stop any barriers to exclusive breastfeeding. He identified “aggressive promotion of formula by manufacturers” as the first of these barriers.

For starters, he announced that formula would no longer be supplied free of charge at government health facilities to mothers who are able to breastfeed. While that still leaves a huge loophole for abuse, he added: “I will make regulations to enforce the International Code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes”. This is good news for South Africa which has been sitting on a very good draft law for many years. Whatever stopped the draft from being enacted may now be overcome.

Over 700 participants at the Meeting adopted the **TSHWANE DECLARATION of support for breastfeeding in South Africa**, which recommended among other points

- that “national regulations [based on the Code] be finalised, adopted into legislation within twelve months, fully implemented and outcomes monitored”.

A strong law in South Africa would also benefit neighbouring countries who currently suffer an overflow of commercial promotion originating from there.

Meanwhile, Code Watchers be vigilant...