

ACTION ALERT on the IFM-IHF “Special Project on Patient Safety”

Are Hospitals inviting Milk nurses back through the front door?

On the second day of this year’s World Health Assembly, IBFAN investigated the signing ceremony of a “Special Project on Patient Safety” and was alarmed. The manufacturers of infant formula and other breastmilk substitutes may have found an ingenious way back into the hospitals from which the International Code has banned them.

Right on the doorstep of the UN, where Ministers of Health and thousands of other health professionals had gathered for their annual meeting, the International Formula Manufacturers’ association (IFM) hosted a private reception to celebrate a ‘deal’ with the International Hospital Federation (IHF) to ensure “safe preparation of formula in hospitals”. “Nonsense!”, says Annelies Allain, who did the investigation, “*it is like inviting the Mothercraft nurses or Milk nurses back into hospitals through the front door.*”

Code Article 8.2 clearly says that marketing personnel should not perform educational functions... in the healthcare system. Moreover, Article 6.4 says that the use by the healthcare system of ‘professional service representatives’, ‘mothercraft nurses’ or similar personnel, provided or paid for by manufacturers or distributors, should not be permitted. How is IFM going to ensure safe preparation without breaking the Code and without causing a “conflict of interest”, subject of serious caution by resolutions WHA49.15 and WHA58.32.

- IBFAN finds it highly objectionable that the IHF has accepted money from IFM to check on the preparation of formula in hospitals. Of course companies are not allowed in hospitals, although the new IFM Secretary General, Mr. J.C. Javet, a Swiss national, who replaces Andrée Bronner, tried to argue that they are allowed. So the IFM is using money and the IHF to get into hospitals on the pretext of ensuring safer preparation. **Indonesia and Peru** will be pilot countries.
 - Although many were invited to the launch, very few WHO staff accepted the invitation to witness the ceremony. They obviously did not want to seem to endorse this dubious scheme.
 - The head of WHO Food Safety did go to obtain a commitment that the 2008 ***Guidelines for Safe Preparation, storage and handling of powdered infant formula*** <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/micro/pif2007/en/index.html> would be adhered to. These Guidelines include the requirement that formula be mixed with water at 70 degrees C temperature, – the lethal or killer step - which companies hate because it destroys the effect of many additives like pre- and probiotics.
 - IBFAN’s presence hopefully ensured that both IFM and IHF know that we disagree, that we will be alerting our members and asking them to keep a watchful eye.
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