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CAREERS CLINIC

Can I give Christmas gifts to colleagues?

Exchanging gifts can be a good way of boosting team morale, **Tom Moberly** hears, but it's important for doctors to consider whether a present is appropriate

Tom Moberly

If in doubt about a conflict of interest, act as though there is

Beth Walker, medicolegal consultant, Medical Protection Society, says, "Spreading a bit of festive cheer may never have been more important for healthcare staff than this year. There are several factors, however, to take into account from a medicolegal perspective.

"The GMC's ethical guidance on working with colleagues emphasises the importance of respecting the beliefs of those you work alongside, for example being mindful that many healthcare staff may follow faiths where Christmas is not celebrated and adhering to your local policies on equality and diversity. In addition, take care not to cause offence with potentially improper gifts that, even if intended as a joke, could raise doubts around your fitness to practise.

"The GMC's guidance on 'financial and commercial arrangements and conflicts of interest' is also helpful to consider. It cautions that patients' and the public's trust in the profession risks being damaged if gifts are seen to affect your professional judgement. Doctors must take care not to ask for or accept any gifts from colleagues that may affect—or appear to affect—the way they prescribe, treat, or refer patients or commission services. Equally, doctors must not offer such gifts to colleagues. The bottom line from the GMC is 'if in doubt about whether there is a conflict of interest, act as though there is.'

"I would also suggest ensuring you're familiar with your local policy on gifts. For example, depending on the context there may be circumstances where you would need to declare or register gifts between colleagues."

Exercise common sense: ensure no one is excluded and gifts are appropriate

Greg Dolman, medicolegal adviser, MDDUS, says, "Exchanging gifts at work, including in a GP practice or other clinical settings, is often a good way to raise colleague morale and cement relationships in a team. That's particularly true following a professionally testing and difficult year, such as the one now ending.

"However, as with many things during the traditional time of excess that Christmas can usher in for many, it's important that doctors exercise common sense as to what's an appropriate gift. Don't be tempted to stray into a purchase of anything that could be considered obscene, or cause offence. Even if you're

laughing at a jokey present as you buy it, remember the recipient might not share your humour.

"Simple things such as ensuring no one is excluded from a present exchange is another common sense step to take in the workplace. Even if not everyone wants to take part, being given the option will be appreciated.

"The acceptance of gifts by GPs in England is also subject to statutory and contractual regulations. The General Medical Services Contract regulations highlight that a register should be kept of gifts received of a value more than £100 unless the gift is unconnected with their professional services. This register should include details of the donor and the nature of the gift, including whether it was given to the practice or an individual."

Recognise collective achievement

Peter Lees, chief executive, Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management (FMLM), says, "FMLM believes in creating a positive organisational culture that supports good leadership and adheres to the ethical standards for providers of public services.

"The senior management team at FMLM has followed a simple policy of giving small gifts in exceptional circumstances to the team as a whole, to recognise collective achievement and output in times of change, transition, or adversity.

"We've done this to thank and acknowledge each of our loyal and hard working team members who constantly go the extra mile to make FMLM the success it is today.

"We consider these actions fair and commensurate considering the dedication and loyalty of our small team whose contribution to the growth and success of FMLM over the past 10 years, but especially in the past two, has been unequivocal."