



## NEWS

# Royal college stops taking funding from formula milk firms

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London

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has announced that it has stopped accepting funding from companies that make formula milk.<sup>1</sup>

The college said that it received in the region of £40 000 (€46 000; \$52 000) a year from formula milk companies in event sponsorship and advertising, but after a review by the RCPCH council,<sup>2</sup> which advises on policy issues, it ended this practice on 31 January.

“The college, which has 19 000 members worldwide, wishes to reiterate the importance of promoting breastfeeding as the best possible method of infant feeding,” it said.

Under the new arrangement, the RCPCH said, it will continue to “engage and work in partnership” with formula milk companies on specialist formula milks for babies who cannot breastfeed and those with allergies and gastrointestinal conditions.

The policy decision came amid growing pressure from doctors and campaigners for the college to stop accepting funding from formula milk companies, saying that it was incompatible with the healthy promotion of breastfeeding.

In 2016 paediatricians told their college to stop taking money from infant formula milk manufacturers, in a motion passed at the college’s annual general meeting.<sup>3</sup> But the college said that it would continue to allow funding if pre-specified conditions were met, saying that the majority of its members supported such a policy in a consultation.<sup>4</sup>

Charlotte Wright, professor of community health at the University of Glasgow and honorary consultant paediatrician at the Royal Hospital for Children, Glasgow, led the protest in 2016. She said that she was delighted by the college’s U turn but was keen to see the move enshrined in college policy.

“We would like a positive and enduring statement so that it becomes part of college policy in a way that can’t be over-ridden by people changing their minds,” she told *The BMJ*. “While the college has said it won’t take money from formula milk companies, that doesn’t stop satellite organisations taking sponsorship. But this is a good start.”

Wright considered it reasonable for the college to continue to engage with formula milk companies with regard to specialist formula milks. “But we shouldn’t take money from companies we are trying to influence.”

In a recent article in *The BMJ* Chris van Tulleken, honorary senior lecturer at University College London, suggested that allergy to cow’s milk protein may be acting as a “Trojan horse” for the formula milk industry to extend relations with healthcare professionals.<sup>5</sup> He cautioned, “Extensive links between the formula industry and the research, guidelines, medical education, and public awareness efforts around cow’s milk protein allergy have raised the question of industry driven overdiagnosis.”

- 1 Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. RCPCH statement on relationship with formula milk companies. Feb 2019. <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-statement-relationship-formula-milk-companies>.
- 2 Mayor S. Formula milk: RCPCH promises to review funding arrangements with industry. *BMJ* 2019;364:l544. 10.1136/bmj.l544 30718307
- 3 Gulland A. Royal college told to stop taking money from infant formula milk firms. *BMJ* 2016;353:i2459. 10.1136/bmj.i2459 27125784
- 4 Thornton J. Paediatricians vote for college to continue accepting funds from infant formula companies. *BMJ* 2016;355:i5827. 10.1136/bmj.i5827 27793794
- 5 van Tulleken C. Overdiagnosis and industry influence: how cow’s milk protein allergy is extending the reach of infant formula manufacturers. *BMJ* 2018;363:k5056. 10.1136/bmj.k5056 30518598

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