



24 October 2017

Sophie Scott
National Medical Reporter
ABC
scott.sophie@abc.net.au

Re: Big Pharma's cash splash on nurses, dietitians and pharmacists

Dear Sophie,

I'm contacting you about your article 'Big Pharma's cash splash on nurses, dietitians and pharmacists', published online by the ABC today and discussed on ABC radio, reporting on data by Professor Lisa Bero from the University of Sydney.

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) represents more than 6,000 members – the country's nutrition and dietetic professionals.

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are committed to helping people improve their health through food and nutrition. They take very seriously their responsibility of providing personalised nutrition advice and support, based on robust and objective evidence.

Your online article reports \$25,000 in payments (2016-2017) to dietitians from pharmaceutical companies, the bulk of which are reportedly from a company called Shire. DAA understands this 'spend' was to support professional development of dietitians working in a niche, complex and rapidly-changing area of practice, specifically inborn errors of metabolism.

People with an inborn error of metabolism, such as phenylketonuria (or PKU), require specialised dietary advice and special medical foods/supplements. These conditions are rare, and if not treated, can lead to serious medical or intellectual disabilities, or death.

Whether in the area of inborn errors of metabolism, or any other area in which dietitians work, keeping abreast of the evidence is the cornerstone of good practice. APDs are professionals who are able to assess and synthesise information from a variety of sources, including from workshops and conferences, and make informed decisions over time.

It's a sad reality that there's minimal Government funding to support professional development among allied health professionals, such as clinical dietitians working in public hospitals. And this is something DAA would like to see change.

As dietitians do not prescribe medications (for inborn errors of metabolism, or any other medical condition), Professor Bero is drawing a long bow in suggesting the nutrition advice provided by allied health professionals, including dietitians, is influenced by a desire to support drug sales or to push for specific tests that may lead to drug prescription.

Instead, APDs are passionate about supporting health and wellbeing through food and nutrition.

Like other allied health professionals, APDs are bound by professional standards (DAA's Code of Professional Conduct and Statement of Ethical Practice) and accountable for the advice they provide, which is based on best practice, and underpinned by scientific evidence.

Thank you for continuing to discuss nutrition-related topics with your audiences, and for considering the above.

I encourage you to come to DAA for our perspective or comment on future stories you may be working on. The best contact at DAA is our Media and Marketing Dietitian, Pattie King, who can be contacted on media@daa.asn.au or telephone 0409 661 920.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Hewat". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire Hewat AdvAPD

CEO

Dietitians Association of Australia