Joint Guidance on
Virtual and Hybrid International Medical Congresses

by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to new ways of working for biopharmaceutical companies, which have replaced in-office visits and face-to face congresses with virtual and hybrid engagements to maintain dialogue and scientific exchange with the medical community while protecting the health and safety of patients, healthcare professionals and their own employees.

The IFPMA's Ethos and Code of Practice set global standards for industry business practices, which must be maintained in the virtual and hybrid settings. This guidance is regularly amended and updated, taking into consideration experience and learnings. Companies should adhere to the requirements established by their country's applicable laws, regulations, or industry codes of practice. In the event of a conflict between the provisions of the applicable laws, regulations, and codes, the more restrictive of the conflicting provisions should apply.

Scope of the Guidance

This guidance applies to all Virtual and Hybrid International Congresses organized by medical associations/societies involving HCPs from multiple countries, and activities organized by Companies at these congresses (e.g. exhibition stands, satellite symposia). Specifically, this guidance sets out factors IFPMA/EFPIA/PhRMA member companies and non-member companies who are signatories to the PhRMA, IFPMA, or EFPIA Codes (collectively, "Companies") should consider when determining which code and/or label to use as reference for the Company activities at such Virtual and Hybrid International Congresses.

All other congresses, such as national congresses organized by medical associations/societies in one country with a focus on HCPs from that country and individual company-organized meetings, etc. are excluded from the scope of this guidance.

Purpose of the Guidance

The pharmaceutical industry supports a wide range of local, national, and international meetings, organized by third parties, providing funding to assist in the medical education of HCPs, sponsorships to medical societies organizing events, hiring of exhibition space, support of speakers, etc. These activities are covered by Article 7 (Events and Meetings) of the IFPMA Code, Article 10 of the EFPIA Code and Articles 4, 5 and 7 of the PhRMA Code. While these requirements were originally drafted for in-person meetings, they apply similarly to virtual and hybrid meetings and require that support and attendance be based on the event's educational value, considering the educational program, overall cost, nature of the audience, cybersecurity and privacy arrangements, with attention paid to the overall impression given by all the various arrangements. Companies should clearly document their reasons for supporting events, including Virtual and Hybrid International Congresses.

IFPMA, EFPIA and PhRMA code provisions also cover the appropriate communication of promotional and non-promotional information during International Congresses, deferring to host country regulations in instances where medicine is not approved in the host country or not approved in the country of a participating HCP. In the context of virtual meetings, the notion of "host country" is no longer applicable, and this guidance seeks to replicate the Codes' pragmatic approach in the virtual

and hybrid format. This guidance aims to inform other stakeholders such as medical associations/societies, third party organizers etc. about the arrangements Companies should fulfil in a virtual and hybrid setting.

Guidance

Activities organized by a Company (e.g. exhibition stands, satellite symposia) associated with a Virtual International Medical Congress should comply with the following requirements:

- Given the global scope of the IFPMA Code, Companies are expected to use the IFPMA Code as the minimum standard. The EFPIA and PhRMA Codes reflect the principles and rules of the IFPMA Code and should be considered in conjunction with the IFPMA Code when the meeting is hosted by a European or American medical association.
- Companies should consider the code of the region from which the majority of delegates would be expected to come based, on past experience. When there is no regional code, the IFPMA code applies. This particular code may be referred to for adjudication purposes, as may the code from where the individual attendees come from. When considering the distribution or display of promotional material at International Congresses and assuming the majority of delegates are expected to be from the US or Europe, Member Companies should consider the US and European label for the products being discussed.
- The selection of the relevant industry code should be based on Industry practice rather than merely relying on the code referenced by the host (e.g. Medical Society) of the international congress. It is important for Companies to clearly identify the label which (promotional) materials reflect, to avoid any possible confusion. Promotional material must be accompanied by a statement indicating the countries in which the medicinal product is registered, and by an explanatory statement indicating that registration conditions may differ internationally. Additionally, the statement should be prominently displayed (e.g. via a pop-up box or alternative display) informing delegates to refer to prescribing information from their home country as information may be different for each country (see Explanatory Statements/Disclaimer examples).

Attendee Identification and Access

- Companies should ensure that a process is in place to confirm participants' status as HCPs/Non-HCPs (patient advocates, journalists, industry representatives, etc.). It is expected that they will work with the medical association(s) to ensure that the congress' virtual platforms allow for participant categorization, and to work with the medical association/society (congress owner) to make reasonable efforts to restrict access to promotional material to HCPs only, where required by applicable rules and regulations. Where the medical association's platform does not have a categorization capability, Companies should consider alternative mechanisms to enable attendee classification for their promotional section. Where it is impossible to restrict access to HCPs due to the congress platform or equivalent, there must be a clear statement to the attendee that the materials/communication are designed and intended for HCPs only.
- Restrictions on non-HCPs are not applicable to industry company representatives or 3rd parties engaged by industry.
- Congress attendees participating virtually should sign a digital consent indicating awareness/acknowledging Virtual and Hybrid Congress terms and conditions, such as specific permission to access different virtual areas (lectures, commercial expositions, social engagement sites, the basis of promotional material development, etc.). Even if this is the

responsibility of the medical association/society, Companies need to be aware of the content of these kinds of explanatory statements/disclaimers. Companies need to have a lawful basis (e.g. consent) for sharing personal data with the medical association/society in case they are registering HCPs for the congress

- The medical association/society has to ensure that data privacy requirements are embedded in the overall congress platform (e.g. registration, access controls to different sections like commercial exhibition or scientific sessions).
- Technology is developing quickly and this document provides the overall framework for all geographies. Where feasible, reasonable efforts for geotagging by the medical associations/societies should be considered.

Congress Websites & Material

- To avoid confusion it is recommended, that virtual International Congress Website and Documents do not use visuals of a specific country or city. Virtual events have no link to a location and hence have no link to a country code.
- Congress materials including microsites and other related websites, where possible should be accessible from the Congress Platform with no direct access from links, websites, or search engines. It must be clear to the viewer that the materials are part of the Congress.
- See further details in FAQ Document

Explanatory statements/Disclaimers

As stated above, Companies should include a statement explaining to delegates when entering their virtual booth/exhibition that help them understand the context by which the material was developed and to highlight that the content may not be applicable to their country.

Examples include:

- "You are viewing an International Virtual Congress run by [society name] and provided to international HCPs from around the world. Please note that prescribing information provided here may vary depending on local approval in each country. For purposes of [congress name], best efforts were undertaken by [society name] and congress sponsors to ensure compliance with [relevant code], however, you should review your local prescribing information and consult directly the local affiliate of the relevant Company to address any questions."
- "The materials for [PRODUCT(S)] contained in this virtual exhibition are approved for use only in [COUNTRY]. Prescribing information may vary depending on local approval in each country. Therefore, before prescribing any product, always refer to local materials such as the prescribing information and/or the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC)."

Hybrid Congresses

- As Hybrid Congresses have both in-person (registered attendees) and virtual elements, the principles of the in-person location's country code should apply to the congress elements and activities. Symposia streamed into a hub should generally follow the jurisdiction of the primary location for the meeting. Should a congress set up not be covered by this document recommendation (e.g. multiple regional life congress hubs joining together to a hybrid congress), then the code reference should be aligned between the medical society and participating companies through a Congress Industry Roundtable, keeping the principles of this document in mind.

Definitions

- For purposes of this guidance an **International (Medical) Congress** is a scientific meeting organized by a medical association/society etc. for their members with the opportunity for industry to participate in the form of exhibition (medical and commercial), satellite symposia etc. The medical association/society is the owner of the congress and responsible for attendee management, access, and other relevant criteria, e.g. the scientific agenda. The Congress gathers a multinational group of medical experts and professionals with the objective to increase the knowledge about and expertise in a disease state and treatment, to facilitate exchange and ultimately to advance patient care. The delegates usually comprise of HCPs, researchers and other individuals who work in the healthcare and/or research environment.
- A **Virtual International (Medical) Congress** is an International Congress where all activities are virtual/digital without an in-person event linked to it. Companies have the opportunity to participate in the form of virtual exhibition stands as well as virtual satellite symposia.
- A **Hybrid International (Medical) Congress** is an International Congress that has activities in virtual / digital as well as in-person elements at one or multiple locations. For the purpose of this guidance the in-person portion of the congress should always have registered attendees.
- **Exhibition Stands** are areas in the context of an International Congress where pharmaceutical companies (and other organizations) can display their product material to delegates in the commercial booth and their scientific material in the medical exhibition area.
- A **Satellite symposium** is a company-owned activity which occurs immediately prior, during or immediately after the main scientific program in the context of an International Congress.
- A **Healthcare Professional** (HCP) means any member of the medical, dental, pharmacy or nursing professions or any other person who in the course of his or her professional activities may prescribe, recommend, purchase, supply, sell or administer a pharmaceutical product.
- A **Congress Hub** is a local / regional, secondary to the main congress location, life set up providing congress experience to a sub group of the registered attendees whilst being virtually connected to the main congress life program. Congress Hubs can take many different forms.

For more information, please read the Q&A document offering assistance in interpreting the IFPMA, EFPIA and PhRMA joint guidance on Virtual International Medical Congresses.