

Update: ILCA 2009 Conference Exhibit Hall and Advertising Policy
by: Liz Brooks, JD IBCLC FILCA (ILCA Secy 2005-11)

ILCA members may notice a few changes in 2009 advertising and conference exhibits, as a result of a lengthy policy review process. One of these changes is that Medela, Inc. will not be exhibiting at the 2009 ILCA Annual Conference, nor will their advertisements be accepted in the *Journal of Human Lactation*.

The following background information and recent updates are provided as part of ILCA's commitment to transparency in governance to its members. If you have any further questions or comments about this issue, please convey them to ILCA at info@ilca.org.

History

In April 2008, ILCA instituted new procedures to review applications for booths in our Exhibit Hall, one of the most popular features of the ILCA annual conference. Our concern: identifying potential vendors at the conference whose marketing is not supportive of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes ("Int'l Code")*. Why? To show our organizational support -- embodied in our by-laws -- for this seminal policy statement, first issued by the World Health Organisation in 1981, and reaffirmed several times since in World Health Assembly Resolutions (see http://www.ibfan.org/site2005/Pages/article.php?art_id=52&iui=1).

The new procedures allow ILCA to turn to the National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy (NABA), for an expert opinion on the interpretation of the *Int'l Code* as it might apply to the Exhibit Hall. It was critically important that such a decision be made by an outside group, in a time-sensitive matter, to avoid the inherent conflict of interest in having ILCA making the final determination. And, this is NABA's very purpose: it is the organization representing IBFAN (International Baby Food Action Network) and WABA (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action) in the United States (though, of course, their expertise is not geographically-limited; they are experts on an international document). NABA's Code Help Center was created because "there are a number of gray areas and a level of uncertainty regarding situations and materials that crop up in various settings. While the WHA resolutions are targeted towards closing loopholes in the Code, there still remain ever changing marketing practices and products that require consultation" (see <http://www.naba-breastfeeding.org/nabareal.htm>).

In July 2008, ILCA hosted a first-time meeting between corporate executives of Medela, and NABA's executive director, to allow an in-depth discussion of marketing tactics by this breast pump company. Note that breastpumps are *not* a product covered by the *Int'l Code*. However, when bottles-and-teats are marketed to the public-at-large, in conjunction with a breastpump, then the marketing falls under Code proscription. Thereafter, ILCA pulled out, but was pleased to learn that Medela and NABA (which pulled in INFACT Canada and IBFAN) continued with several meetings and communications to explore *Int'l Code* interpretation and enforcement.

Recent Events

In December 2008 ILCA President Angela Smith received the following letter from Medela:

December 2, 2008

Subject: Medela and the WHO Code

Dear Ms. Angela Smith,

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (the WHO Code), as well as Medela, emphasize that breastfeeding is best for mothers and babies. Medela has worked diligently for many years to support World Health Organization's mission to protect mothers and babies in breastfeeding. We have educated health care professionals and mothers on the benefits of breastmilk and made great efforts to pledge our dedication to breastfeeding through research and education.

Today, many mothers rely on Medela's safe, complete breastfeeding systems to keep their babies on breastmilk and to increase the duration of breastfeeding when separated from baby. Such systems include breastpumps, as well as bottles and teats to feed expressed breastmilk to their babies. Medela feels that it is very important to give mothers access to the information and education on the proper use and benefits of this complete feeding system, getting breastmilk from mom to baby. However, these activities bring Medela in a conflict with the current interpretation of the WHO Code with regard to the marketing of bottles and teats.

After a careful evaluation we believe our actions continue to support the WHO Code's intent to support breastfeeding and oppose breastmilk substitutes. However, we recognize and sincerely regret that our actions may be considered as a WHO Code violation. This is painful for us given our common goals to support breastfeeding mothers. Medela will remain faithful to its Support Pledge and Destiny statement. We will continue to lead basic research and product innovation related to breastfeeding and will never engage in promoting breastmilk substitutes.

"We pledge our dedication to breastfeeding as the best nutrition for babies and families. We further pledge that our breastfeeding accessory products and literature shall never be used to influence mothers to switch from breastfeeding to infant formula feeding. Nor shall our breastfeeding accessory products and literature be used in any way to promote artificial baby milk." Breastfeeding Support Pledge, Olle Larsson, Founder of Medela.

This letter announces a change that will have no influence in our work or our dedication. Yesterday, today and tomorrow - we are the same company that remains fully committed to protecting a mother's endeavor to breastfeed and provide the best nutrition for her baby. This will not have any impact in our collaboration and our beliefs. It is important for us to inform you first hand on our decision and please do not hesitate to contact us directly if you need further

information.

Kind regards,

Carr Lane Quackenbush
Rachel S. Mennell
Medela Inc.
McHenry, IL

ILCA Response

Shortly after receiving this letter, the *Journal of Human Lactation* editors were informed of Medela's voluntary decision to pull its planned ads in our association's periodical.

ILCA is pleased that Medela and NABA undertook a serious discussion of *Code*-related matters, although it is disappointed that the corporation has elected not to alter its current marketing measures. We also appreciate the professional manner in which Medela chose to notify ILCA of their ultimate decision.

ILCA abides by NABA's determination that Medela is in violation of the *Int'l Code* through its use of pictures of bottles-and-teats on pump boxes, and on its parent-aimed website pages. Note that pictures of milk-collection containers that are attached to a pump are *Code*-compliant; it is bottles-and-teats that are a violation. As such, Medela will not be allowed to sponsor a booth in the Exhibit Hall of our annual conferences; nor will their ads be allowed in JHL.