



An Introduction to the PAAB

What is the PAAB?

The PAAB is an independent review agency whose primary role, as defined by Health Canada, is to ensure pharmaceutical advertising and promotion is accurate, balanced and evidence-based. This includes medical journal advertising, sales aids, company-directed CME programs, Canadian-based Web sites and patient pamphlets. The PAAB maintains a Code of Advertising Acceptance used to “preclear” ads and promotional material prior to their publication or use, and against which any complaints or infractions are evaluated. The PAAB also provides advisory comments on direct-to-consumer materials for prescription drugs and monitors pharmaceutical advertising for compliance. Preclearance is conducted by scientifically trained reviewers, who scrutinize product claims to ensure they are consistent with the product monograph and that data from well-controlled clinical studies have been interpreted properly and presented accurately. PAAB is an independent, nonprofit, multistakeholder organization that operates on a self-financing, fee-for-service basis.

The agency responsible for regulating drug company advertising and promotion to health professionals in Canada, the Pharmaceutical Advertising Advisory Board (PAAB), recently announced it has completed an end-to-end review of the rules governing acceptable pharmaceutical advertising in Canada. It’s been 10 years since such an exhaustive review of the PAAB Code of Acceptance was undertaken.

Following an extensive consultation process that involved submissions from more than 70 stakeholders, including provincial formularies, Health Canada, medical advertising companies, patient groups and the pharmaceutical industry, PAAB has identified several opportunities to address developments in the areas of Internet communications, direct-to-consumer advertising and continuing medical education.

“The submissions we received illustrate the need to update the Code to address new technologies and media that have been adopted by the industry over the last 10 years,” says Ray Chepesiuk, PAAB Commissioner.

“The Code is a living and dynamic document that must reflect developments in the marketplace.”

Although well-known to national medical organizations, many individual physicians are not aware of the PAAB.

Recent focus-group research undertaken by the PAAB revealed a high percentage of Canadian physicians, both family practitioners and specialists, were largely unaware of how the pharmaceutical advertising and promotion aimed at them was regulated and evaluated prior to its publication or use.

Physicians were surprised to learn six of the seven PAAB reviewers are licensed pharmacists who scrutinize advertiser’s claims to ensure they are consistent with the product monograph and verify that data cited are based on solid clinical evidence and have been accurately interpreted and presented.

The focus-group research also noted physicians’ initial skepticism about the independent nature of the PAAB. This was subsequently moderated upon learning the PAAB is not an industry-run body and no one company or stakeholder group has any opportunity to influence the outcome of a PAAB advertising review decision.

“My role as commissioner is to ensure that the rules set out by the PAAB Code of Advertising are adhered to by the pharmaceutical industry,” says Chepesiuk.

“The PAAB logo signifies that advertising and promotion has undergone an objective and rigorous review. Therefore, physicians should be able to trust that the pharmaceutical advertising aimed at them is accurate, risk/benefit balanced and evidence-based.”

Recommendations arising from the PAAB Code review will be forwarded to the PAAB Board of Directors for discussion and approval. Implementation of the changes, once approved, would likely follow in the second quarter of 2005.

The complete Code and supplementary guidelines are available at www.paab.ca or through the PAAB office.



The PAAB team.