

Is WHO Code Compliance enough to effectively promote breastfeeding?

What does a company need to do to truly and effectively promote breastfeeding? Is compliance with the WHO Code sufficient to suggest a company effectively promotes breastfeeding? Or is it also necessary to look beyond compliance and consider what other things - for example breastfeeding research - a company does to support and champion breastfeeding? We at Medela believe it is necessary to look at the total picture, which means looking beyond requirements and claims of Code compliance.

Since the establishment of Medela, supporting a mother's desire and efforts to breastfeed her baby has been a mission of ours. This includes helping a mother extend her breastfeeding duration through effective maintenance of her milk supply when she needs to be separated from her baby. For mothers who are unable to breastfeed, such as mothers of a NICU baby, our goal is to help that mother provide her baby with the life-giving benefits of breastmilk.

In the last 10 years, Medela has invested a significant share of its profits into medical research on breastfeeding. We are proud of the fact that Medela is the only manufacturer that is dedicated to providing ongoing intensive support for [breastfeeding research](#). We will continue to bring these new findings and knowledge to lactation and healthcare professionals, as well as to the specialty trade and our partners. With these research results we have not only improved our existing products but we have also brought new and innovative products to mothers and clinicians. A considerable part is concerned with basic research and does not result in the development of new products. In workshops and advanced training sessions, we convey all this knowledge and research findings to lactation consultants and healthcare professionals to provide support for breastfeeding issues in every-day practice. Undiminished in scope, we will continue our research efforts, most recently expanding research activities into the field of neonatology.

The WHO Code was implemented to stop the uncontrolled and aggressive marketing of artificial baby milk in the 1980s to protect mothers and babies. Medela has been developing, manufacturing and selling breastpumps and breastfeeding accessories since 1980. These products were initially provided with bottles and nipples/teats, as complete breastpumping and baby feeding systems. However, we decided to remove all nipple/teats from our products based upon feedback from the lactation community and breastfeeding associations with whom we closely cooperated. In the nineties, breastfeeding rates and duration increased steadily while, at the same time, the use of breastpumps strongly changed especially in the US. More and more, mothers started to use breastpumps to express their milk to be able to provide breastmilk to their babies when returning to work or when separated from the baby. These mothers then began to ask Medela for a complete system.

Today's mothers expect from Medela complete, high-quality products which support breastfeeding effectively. Supporting breastfeeding and serving the needs of mothers and babies have always been the key focus of all our activities. Therefore, in select countries, Medela decided to introduce a complete and safe system consisting of breastpump, bottle and nipple/teat but never actively promoted or marketed it.

In response to the controversy around BPA in the US and in Canada in early summer 2008, Medela decided to promote breastmilk bottles and nipples/teats in these countries, thus informing mothers about our BPA-free, safe breastmilk bottles and feeders. As a consequence, Medela was classified a WHO Code Violator by NABA (National Association of Breastfeeding Advocacy).

This circumstance shows how difficult it is to fulfill mother's interests and needs, without violating existing regulations. Despite this conflict, our main goal, supporting breastfeeding, will remain for now and the future. We are convinced that mothers desire clear and direct information and wish for a complete compatible and safe system. In looking back, we acknowledge we could have exercised better judgment with a few of our marketing activities. Consequently, we have developed strict and specific internal marketing guidelines for our breastmilk feeding products. These guidelines will ensure we are only speaking with mothers who have already chosen to express their breastmilk and therefore need a delivery system back to their baby.

In closing, we ask that you keep in mind that we are all united in our desire to support breastfeeding. We also ask that you evaluate Medela's dedication to breastfeeding, as well as that of other manufacturers, not solely on Code-compliance. And, we are hopeful that our long-standing history of effectively promoting breastfeeding globally and our continued dedication to support and champion breastfeeding among mothers and healthcare professionals will be the foundation of a continued relationship for many years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Michael Larsson", written in a cursive style.

Michael Larsson
Chairman of the Medela Board of Directors

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