



By email: British Journal of Midwifery

25th March 2022

Dear Ms Allikns

I am writing to you on behalf of the Baby Feeding Law Group-UK (BFLG-UK) regarding the sponsorship of the upcoming British Journal of Midwifery (BJM) Conference on the 29th and 30th March 2022 by the breastmilk substitute companies Kendamil Nutricare and Nutricia, parent company Danone.

The BFLG-UK are a group of 30 organisations who together work to protect infant, young child and maternal health in relation to how infants are fed. We aim to protect breastfeeding and whilst we do not aim to prevent access to formula for safe and appropriate formula feeding, we do oppose unethical and misleading marketing practices which seek to undermine informed decision making on, and profit from, infant feeding. This is a longstanding and widespread issue that has most recently been documented in a multi-country study including the UK, commissioned by WHO and UNICEF, the report of which can be accessed here: [Multi-country study examining the impact of BMS marketing on infant feeding decisions and practices, UNICEF, WHO 2022.pdf](#).

As I am sure you are aware, the UK government is a signatory to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and its subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions (in short 'The Code'). The Code aims to protect the health of women, infants and young children from the influence of unscrupulous marketing of breastmilk substitutes, in order to safeguard breastfeeding and safe and appropriate formula feeding. Breastmilk substitutes include infant formula and any milks (or products and foods that could be used to replace milks, including specialist milks) that are specifically marketed for feeding infants and young children up to the age of 3 years, as well as bottles and teats. The Code is integral to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. In addition, the NHS Long Term Plan recommends Unicef UK Baby Friendly accreditation across all maternity services, and health professionals working within accredited settings must work within the Code. This means avoiding industry funded meetings, as World Health Assembly resolution 69.9 states that sponsorship of meetings of health professionals by the breastmilk substitute industry should not be allowed. Currently 43% of maternity settings and 67% of health visiting services are fully accredited by Unicef UK Baby Friendly, with a further 95% and 91% respectively, actively working towards accreditation.

Baby Feeding Law Group UK Members:

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM), Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services (AIMS), Baby Milk Action, Best Beginnings, Breastfeeding Network (BfN), the Centre for Lactation, Infant Feeding and Translational research (LIFT), Code Monitoring Northern Ireland, Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), Doula UK, The Fatherhood Institute, First Steps Nutrition Trust, GP Infant Feeding Network (GPIFN), HENRY, Hospital Infant Feeding Network (HIFN), Human Milk Foundation, Institute of Health Visiting, Lactation Consultants GB (LCGB), La Leche League GB (LLLGB), Leicester Mammias, Local Infant Feeding Information Board (LIFIB), Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS), National Breastfeeding Helpline, NCT, Royal College of Midwives (RCM), Save the Children, UK Association of Milk Banking (UKAMB), Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative, Unison, Women's Environmental Network (WEN), and World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative.

Secretariat: vicky@firststepsnutrition.org.



We would also like to share with you our perceptions of the motivations of companies such as Kendamil and Nutricia for sponsoring events such as your conference. It is against the law in many countries including the UK for companies to promote infant formula. By partnering with organisations or sponsoring events, these companies avoid workplace controls on advertising and gain direct access to health care workers, including in the case of the BJM conference, midwives, and in doing so create a valuable link to pregnant and post-partum women. The fundamental aim of marketing is to convince consumers that the product or brand in question is somehow 'superior', leading to increased revenue. Danone is the largest dairy company globally and baby milk accounts for 80% of Danone's 'Nutricia Early Life Nutrition' division, with the UK being one of the largest markets for these products ([BFLG+UK+Danone Nutricia corporate partner doc Mar2021.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)). It is also noteworthy that in the last 13 months, the Advertising Standards Authority has upheld two complaints made against Kendamil for breaches of the UK law in relation to its marketing practices ([Kendal Nutricare Ltd - ASA | CAP](#)).

In permitting sponsorship of your conference by breastmilk substitute companies, you are allowing increased exposure of their brands and logos to health care professionals and providing legitimacy to their claims they are somehow superior to other breast milk substitute companies, as well as providing them the opportunity to imply that their products are an equal substitute for breastfeeding. Accepting such sponsorship also acts to undermine the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative 'Call to Action' on implementation of the Code and protection of all babies from commercial interests.

For the reasons summarised above, the BFLG UK would like to strongly recommend that you reconsider your sponsorship policy in relation to the breastmilk substitute industry. We recognise that it is unlikely you will remove sponsorship from the conference in question given that it is happening next week. However, we would like to urge you to consider how to minimise their influence on the attending midwives and other health care professionals given the concerns we have outlined.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further, or find out any more about the BFLG-UK, do please get in touch with me at vicky@firststepsnutrition.org.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V.A.", with a long, sweeping underline.

Dr Victoria Sibson

Baby Feeding Law Group UK Members:

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM), Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services (AIMS), Baby Milk Action, Best Beginnings, Breastfeeding Network (BfN), the Centre for Lactation, Infant Feeding and Translational research (LIFT), Code Monitoring Northern Ireland, Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), Doula UK, The Fatherhood Institute, First Steps Nutrition Trust, GP Infant Feeding Network (GPIFN), HENRY, Hospital Infant Feeding Network (HIFN), Human Milk Foundation, Institute of Health Visiting, Lactation Consultants GB (LCGB), La Leche League GB (LLLGB), Leicester Mammias, Local Infant Feeding Information Board (LIFIB), Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS), National Breastfeeding Helpline, NCT, Royal College of Midwives (RCM), Save the Children, UK Association of Milk Banking (UKAMB), Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative, Unison, Women's Environmental Network (WEN), and World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative.

Secretariat: vicky@firststepsnutrition.org.