

# Disclose drug payments,

## NHS tells doctors

By Edward Malnick

DRUGS firms should stop paying doctors and health service officials who refuse to be named in a new transparency register, the NHS has warned.

In an unusual intervention the health service insisted that “voluntary disclosure does not go far enough”, after more than half of the £111 million paid out for advisory work, travel and conferences was not individually declared in a database published on Thursday by the pharmaceutical industry.

The database is a voluntary scheme by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), intended to show the payments and benefits-in-

kind being given by drugs firms to doctors, nurses and NHS officials across the country.

But the *The Daily Telegraph* revealed earlier this week how hundreds of individuals had refused to be included, citing data protection laws.

GlaxoSmithKline was able to publish details of almost all of the individuals it paid, after warning them that it would no longer pay for their services if they withheld consent. However the ABPI had declined to ask all of its members to do the same.

But yesterday the NHS warned that all firms should decline to pay those who refuse to be included in the database. An NHS England spokesman said:

“The ABPI publication is an important step forward in terms of transparency, but is not yet the complete solution.

“Voluntary disclosure does not go far enough, and all companies should follow industry leaders in refusing to fund individuals who decline to be transparent about their payments.”

The spokesman added that a panel led by Sir Malcolm Grant, chairman of NHS England, was drawing up recommendations on what payments information should be routinely published.

In the past year, a series of *Telegraph* investigations has exposed the practice of NHS staff involved in prescribing work taking lucrative advisory fees from drugs firms, as well as going on

trips abroad funded by the companies. The pharmaceutical industry says firms need the expertise of doctors, nurses and officials to help “bring the right medicine to the right patient at the right time”.

But the practice has also raised concerns about the potential for conflicts of interest between an individual’s commercial and NHS work. An investigation by NHS Protect into the *Telegraph*’s findings is continuing.

The ABPI’s database provides a breakdown of payments from drugs firms to individual doctors, nurses, pharmacists and NHS officials. It said the publication was “a milestone moment for transparency in our industry”. In total, £111 mil-

lion was paid to medical staff and officials in 2015 for “non-research and development”, including £46 million for “fees for service and consultancy”.

It admitted that the payments making up around 52 per cent of this total were not itemised because the recipients had refused to be included.

Ben Goldacre, the author and lead academic at the Evidence-Based Medicine Data Lab at Oxford University, warned: “A financial conflict of interest does not necessarily mean that somebody is up to no good, but it does mean there are risks, and that they may be biased. That’s why clearly declaring your conflicts matters, so that we can all judge for ourselves.”