

Scottish Conference axed over Nestlé sponsorship



The Building A Healthier, Fairer Scotland conference was cancelled last week following complaints over sponsorship by Switzerland-based Nestlé. Picture: Sunday Herald 1 June

A public health conference entitled, 'Building a Healthier, Fairer Scotland', scheduled to take place in Edinburgh end May 2014 was cancelled at the 11th hour after senior National Health Service figures urged attendees to boycott the event in protest against its "gold" sponsor, Nestlé.

The talks were set to bring researchers, policy makers, National Health Service (NHS) directors and NGOs together to discuss public health issues such as obesity, child nutrition, tobacco regulation and hepatitis C.

Our IBFAN partner, Baby Milk Action (BMA), hailed the cancellation in view of Nestlé's aggressive marketing techniques in promoting baby foods.

Commenting on the development, Patti Rundall, policy director of BMA said: *"...the sponsorship would have done more harm than good. Nestlé would certainly have used it as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility campaign as evidence that it cares about public health and can be trusted to regulate itself. Thankfully health workers in Scotland are respecting the World Health Assembly Resolutions on avoiding conflicts of interest. These resolutions are important if health workers and parents are to get sound objective information."*

Meanwhile, Nestlé says it is disappointed with the cancellation and backed its participation at such events: *"Our intention was to promote the importance of breastfeeding and good nutrition throughout pregnancy and in early life, and ways of supporting parents with their feeding choices. We were not there to talk about any of our products and were open and transparent about our involvement throughout."*

It added that it had been *"very disappointed"* to learn that the conference had been cancelled. *"Particularly on behalf of the organisers who put a huge amount of work into arranging the event, and for the delegates who had registered to attend,"* it said.

P3 media, the conference's organiser, defended the event and its commercial backing.

Neither, it would appear, has heard of the WHA resolutions which warns about conflicts of interest.