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Ms. Wendy Morgan
Office of the Attorney General
109 State Street
Montpelier VT 05609

RE: Comments on Advisability of Requiring Disclosure of Free Samples

Dear Ms. Morgan:

I am writing to provide comments on the pending review and determination by the Vermont Attorney General and the Vermont Health Care Reform Commission as to whether or not to require the disclosure of information about the provision of free samples of prescribed medications to health care providers.

I would like to be clear that the Arthritis Foundation of Northern & Southern New England opposes mandated disclosure of free pharmaceutical samples received from manufacturers. We take this position on behalf of our patients, many of whom depend on the samples provided by doctors. We believe that any action taken to require disclosure will place undue obligations on already overburdened physicians and lead to the unintended consequence of doctors suspending their use of samples.

Among our chief concerns in opposing mandatory disclosure of samples is the financial benefit our members receive through the use of samples. At a time when health care costs continue to rise, any financial benefit our members can receive is not something I want to see threatened. The rising health care costs for Arthritis sufferers is well documented.

According to a 6-year study, the amount spent on arthritis medications more than doubled between 1998 and 2003 due to the fast rising number of people with the disease. This information was reported in the May 2007 issue of "Arthritis & Rheumatism", the journal of the American College of Rheumatology. During this same period, the cost of prescription medications nearly doubled per patient.

Beyond the financial considerations, there are other important benefits for Arthritis sufferers when it comes to the use of samples. Many doctors like to get patients started on a therapy right away and administering a prescription medication in the office makes this possible. In other cases, doctors like to test a patient on different medicines using samples before deciding on a final course of treatment and ordering an expensive 30 or 90 day supply.

With these facts in mind, why would Vermont officials even consider undermining a patient's access to medicine by making the sample process for physicians so burdensome that they stop providing samples?

It is my sincere hope that the Attorney General in conjunction with the Vermont Health Care Commission will recommend that the legislature take no further action to restrict access to much needed medications to Vermont patients.

Sincerely,

Stephen Evangelista
President & CEO