

Communicating SAMED's position regarding localisation of venue vetting criteria (Sept 2021)

The issue

SAMED member companies which are also members of Advamed (US), Medtech Europe and/or Mecomed need to follow the codes of ethics and business practices of all associations that they are members of. This impacts on the multinational companies with direct presence in South Africa and distributors that represent manufacturers/suppliers from these regions.

The three international associations have specific criteria that allow their members to sponsor medical congresses only if these are held at compliant pre-approved venues, such as not principally being a leisure/entertainment/tourism establishments (eg resorts, casinos, spas, seaside hotels).

The implication of this rule is that many South African venues which can host large groups with the required exhibition space are not approved by the international associations' conference vetting systems (CVS). This is largely because the South African travel and tourism sector and industry have to cater for non-business as well as business clientele if they are to remain viable.

SAMED's Medical Device Code is also quite particular in terms of venue selection with the key applicable rule being that the venue location and type must not be the main attraction to the event and an expectation that members will not support events which are held at venues categorised as luxury/bush/mountain/sporting (eg golf) or beach holiday resorts. However, it is less directive and less stringent than the codes of international associations in that SAMED does not have its own CVS system.

Therefore, affected SAMED members – which is the majority of the members currently – are not allowed to sponsor professional events if these are held at venues seen as non-compliant by the international organisations' CVS.

This has significantly reduced venue options for events that members can support. They are left with limited options on suitable conference venues, located predominantly in city centres and with limited options for meals, limited exhibition and presentation space or high venue hire fees. It also negatively affects professional conference organisers (PCOs) who must meet the same criteria.

Several healthcare professional societies have raised concerns with SAMED about the effect of these rules on their members and the weakening of professional education and development.

SAMED efforts towards a mutually beneficial approach

For nearly two years, SAMED has sought to find common ground among the relevant stakeholders. Under the leadership of the Code Committee and in consultation with its Orthopaedic Suppliers subcommittee, SAMED has:

- Discussed the matter with international associations with the aim of securing an alternative approach for South Africa
- Consulted with its members and the professional societies and PCOs and arranged forums where they could share views with each other
- Undertaken various research including establishment of a bespoke South African CVS (which proved to be unfeasible as in any event members would be bound by the stricter CVS outcome, whether it be Ethical Medtech, Mecomed or a South African CVS ruling), obtaining views from members on how it affects their businesses and compliance

Way forward

The result of these activities is that presently, affected SAMED members must abide by the international associations' codes of marketing and business practice and the Ethical Medtech and Mecomed CVS as there is no option of them being bypassed only in South Africa and the establishment of a local CVS by SAMED is not possible.

Accordingly, SAMED has issued a [directive regarding conference venues](#), which states that in line with these international developments whereby some medical device companies are now prohibited from offering aspects of sponsorship at venues that are considered resorts, SAMED has taken a decision not to provide further comment/advice regarding the appropriateness of conference venues. Rather SAMED members must make that decision for themselves, taking into account international and internal code/s they might be bound by, including the SAMED Code.

We therefore advise stakeholders to the industry eg conference organisers, professional societies etc to first consult with the trade, in particular the multinational companies and affected distributors and get an indication from them prior to finalising a venue for their event as to whether they can support the event if it is being held at a particular venue. Such stakeholders can then make an informed decision as to whether they will receive sufficient support from the trade and appropriate CVS sanction in order to make holding an event at a particular venue viable or not.