



**The Royal College of Midwives**  
15 Mansfield Street, London, W1G 9NH

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### **Advertising Standards Authority: Tackling harmful gender stereotypes in advertising**

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is the trade union and professional organisation that represents the vast majority of practising midwives in the UK. It is the only such organisation run by midwives for midwives. The RCM is the voice of midwifery, providing excellence in representation, professional leadership, education and influence for and on behalf of midwives. We actively support and campaign for improvements to maternity services and provide professional leadership for one of the most established clinical disciplines.

The RCM is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the consultation process in relation to the proposal to introduce the following new rule to the Advertising Codes which will cover broadcast and non-broadcast media:

*Advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.*

The RCM agrees in principle with the above statement, however we urge caution in applying this rule to the advertising of breastmilk substitute, or formula milk.

The marketing of infant formula milk is strictly regulated in accordance with the provisions of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. The purpose of these regulations is to control messages disseminated by the infant feeding industry to promote their products and to protect exclusive breastfeeding as the optimum method for feeding babies below 6 months of age.

'Follow on milk', which is a supplementary feeding product is not regulated in the same way. Adverts promote this product and are widely viewed via mainstream media.

Usually mothers that take the lead in these advertisements, where they are featured administering the feeds and talking about the perceived qualities of the various milks.

Infant feeding is a complex issue and clearly fathers have an important role to play. Evidence shows that when a woman chooses to breastfeed, she is more likely to have a good experience if her partner supports her decision.

However, the RCM is concerned that infant feeding industry may call for fathers to be encouraged to take a more equal and instrumental role in formula milk adverts, on the grounds that current advertising includes gender stereotyping.

This could undermine efforts by midwives and other health professionals as they work hard to support women to breastfeed, if fathers are influenced by advertisements showing they have an equally important part to play in infant feeding.

The World Health Organisation maintains that alongside complementary solid foods, breastmilk remains most appropriate milk to give a baby from 6 months to 2 years and beyond, and that follow on milks are not necessary.

The RCM urges caution in respect of this, as an unintended consequence of doing this would be to cause harm.

Clearly there are complex issues surrounding the marketing of substitute milks and the RCM is happy to provide further information and advice to the Advertising Standards Authority, as required.

**Royal College of Midwives  
July 2018**