



ABPI and Luther Pendragon parted ways over tobacco lobbying

The Lancet calls on other healthcare organisations to sever ties with the agency

The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) has announced its decisions to part with Luther Pendragon at the end of last year was due to the public affairs agency's involvement with cigarette firm Philip Morris.

"As soon as the ABPI learnt in December last year that Luther Pendragon had taken the decision to work for a tobacco company, we served notice," the Association said in a statement.

News of the communications agency's contract with the tobacco company emerged in December last year, after UK newspaper *The Observer* [reported](#) the agency had "been quietly lobbying against plain packaging [of tobacco products] on behalf of Philip Morris".

The ABPI subsequently appointed London agency MHP Health Mandate, whose other clients include patient groups, NHS bodies and a number of pharma companies, to provide public affairs support.

The ABPI was moved to clarify its position after a number of Twitter users posted links to the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC) [register](#). This showed a list of Luther Pendragon's clients between 1 September 2012 and 30 November 2012, which included both the pharma body and Philip Morris International.

Other tweets highlighted the apparent incongruity of a comms agency working with a tobacco firm while also supporting health agencies, including NHS trusts.

Meanwhile, writing in *The Lancet*, a group of senior clinicians say it would "clearly be unacceptable" for a healthcare organisation to engage an agency that is also working to oppose public health legislation.

In their [correspondence](#) they call on "healthcare organisations, and especially the UK Department of Health, to send out a clear message by severing any links they have with public relations companies that work to promote the interests of the tobacco industry".

Luther Pendragon has so far declined to comment.

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