

Committee on Drugs

Prescription Drug Advertising Direct to the Consumer

There is a rapidly growing practice within the pharmaceutical industry of advertising prescription products directly to the general public through media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and popular magazines. Proponents of direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs have asserted that advertising is a source of useful information for the patient. However, it is the position of the Academy that patient education regarding prescription drugs is provided best by the physician within the context of patient care and not through advertising that is designed primarily to promote the sale and consumption of a specific product. Such advertising contributes little, if anything, to the quality of health care while posing multiple problems that may be counterproductive to the provision of optimal pharmacotherapy for pediatric patients.

The Academy's opposition to direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs stems from its long tradition of advocacy for children and young people, along with a concern regarding the potential negative impact of such advertising on the health care of children and adolescents. The Academy's objection to consumer advertising of specific prescription products does not apply to general health information provided through public service announcements sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry.

Prescription drugs are unique in the marketplace in that they are selected for use by the physician rather than by the consumer. They are designated by law to be used within the patient-physician relationship for the protection and welfare of the patient. In choosing a therapeutic agent for a particular patient's illness, a physician takes into consideration a multitude of complex factors, including

the patient's diagnosis, medical history, previous medication interolances, adverse drug reactions, possible drug interactions, chemical dependency, and the array of products that potentially may be used. Such therapeutic decisions are based on a physician's clinical experience and on objective criteria arising from a background of medical knowledge and training not possessed by the lay consumer. Once a decision has been made, the physician can provide appropriate information in a setting where patient understanding can be tested and compliance encouraged as well as monitored.

In contrast, an admitted purpose of advertising is to promote awareness of and demand for a specific product, thereby increasing its use. The Academy is concerned that direct advertising of drugs to the consumer will create an inappropriate demand for medications and/or a demand for inappropriate medications, neither of which is in the best interests of the patient.

Advertising by its very nature oversimplifies complex issues and may contribute to patient confusion about drugs. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to present balanced information regarding drug efficacy, appropriate use, and risk/benefit considerations in a consumer-targeted advertisement. This is particularly true for television and radio advertisements, in which a brief promotional message is delivered with no opportunity for the consumer to process, critique, and assimilate the message.

Full disclosure of contraindications, warnings, precautions, drug interactions, and possible adverse effects of a drug, as required by law, without interpreting that information in the context of the individual patient's situation is potentially harmful. For example, a patient or parent may misinterpret cautionary statements which may result in undue concern and cause the patient not to take essential medication. Alternatively, a physician, who enjoys the confidence of the patient and who can interpret appropriate cautionary information, can explain

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these same risks and place them in perspective. The latter method of providing medication information has the greatest potential for encouraging proper use of medication while preserving the patient's awareness of any inherent risks.

The Academy has supported and continues to support actively the concept that the patient should be well informed about prescription medications. In the case of the pediatric patient, most frequently it is the parent who must be educated. In addition, older children should be informed to the extent that their maturity and intellectual development allows. It is the physician's responsibility to maintain current knowledge regarding the drugs he/she prescribes and to inform patients adequately about medications they are taking. Furthermore, the Academy will continue to assist pediatricians in maintaining current therapeutic knowledge and communicating appropriate medication information to their patients.

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