

Fact or Fiction: What Healthcare Professionals Need to Know about Pharmaceutical Marketing in the European Union

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Healthcare professionals are highly exposed to pharmaceutical marketing activities. Evidence shows that exposure to information from pharmaceutical companies does not lead to net improvements in prescribing, but can negatively affect prescribing and professional behaviour (Wazana, 2000; Norris et al., 2005; WHO & HAI, 2009; Spurling et al., 2010).

Education about pharmaceutical promotion can affect trainees' awareness and attitudes, which helps counter the influence of promotional practices (Norris et al., 2005; Carroll et al., 2007; Lea et al., 2010). Healthcare professionals come into contact with promotional materials during their studies. However, most medical students do not obtain adequate education on how to critically respond to pharmaceutical promotion (Mintzes, 2005; Mansfield et al., 2006; Austad et al., 2011). This leaves many healthcare practitioners unprepared for ethically challenging situations that ultimately impact their ability to objectively prescribe, or advise patients about, medicines.

85.2% of medical students recently surveyed in France (n=2,101) reported feeling inadequately educated about conflicts of interest arising from interactions with the pharmaceutical industry (Etain et al., 2014).

Being able to identify promotional activities and to understand their impact to medical practice enables critical appraisal. In not helping (future) healthcare practitioners to develop such skills, practitioners may be left to interpret misinformation as fact and to prescribe or dispense specific medicines where other treatment options should be considered.

This guide and associated workshops have been developed to address this oversight by providing an overview of pharmaceutical marketing practices and the ethical issues that arise from them.

Learning Objectives

- To identify and assess the methods used in pharmaceutical promotion activities.

- To understand the impact of pharmaceutical promotion techniques on clinical practice and public health.
- To learn about the European Union (EU) regulatory framework on pharmaceutical promotion and the problem of self-regulation.
- To enable critical appraisal of pharmaceutical promotion activities in a way that safeguards evidence-based medicine.

This guide and its workshop series build on the publication, *Understanding and Responding to Pharmaceutical Promotion: A Practical Guide*, produced by Health Action International, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, in 2009.

The examples used in this publication are not exhaustive, but are included to provide insight into the pharmaceutical industry's strategies and resources as case studies.

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