

Pharmaceutical promotion: how does it impact rational use of medicine?

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Every year, Health Action International (HAI) accepts a few bright and ambitious students into its internship programme at our Amsterdam headquarters. This provides valuable educational experience for students who are interested in conducting research and/or advocacy on a number of access to medicines issues in the European Union or internationally.

This year, our interns spent their first few weeks in the office before the working from home requirements as a result of COVID-19. Instead, they have continued their work from home, shifting their focus slightly to accommodate the new arrangements.

We wanted to learn a little more about what each of them have been doing, and how they've managed to adapt their work in recent weeks. Today, we're hearing from Swasti Soekhradj, who studies at the [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#) and is investigating pharmaceutical promotion as part of her internship at HAI.

If you're interested in doing an internship at HAI, you'll find more information about how to apply [here](#).

How has your research approach/project changed since having to work from home?

During the first week, I really had to adjust to my new 'home office' since I'm used to working at the office or university on my research project. I had to figure out how to stay productive and healthy during all the changes and development in the world. Setting up a daily routine with regular breaks, helps me to stay productive. The only component in my research approach that changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is my field research. I will be conducting my interviews online instead of travelling to the respondents in the Netherlands and France.

What's the best part of research into pharmaceutical promotion. And what's the worst or hardest part?

The best part of doing my research into pharmaceutical promotion is contributing to the development of the curriculums of medical schools on this topic. Through education, medical students can be prepared and equipped with the skills they need to identify and respond to pharmaceutical promotion. This will help them to navigate the big amount of

pharmaceutical promotion materials to rationally prescribe medicine, during their medical education but also in their future career as health care professionals. I think the hardest part for me is yet to come when I will be analysing and interpreting all the data.

What do you wish people would know about your topic?

I wish people knew the negative effects of pharmaceutical promotion. The rational use of medicine can be hindered by the pharmaceutical industry as it specifically targets healthcare professionals with promotional marketing strategies. These strategies can negatively impact the ability of health care professionals to identify incorrect claims about medicines. This can subsequently affect the health outcomes of individuals and potentially their families and communities in a negative way. However, education on pharmaceutical promotion can be used to impact the awareness, attitudes and skills of medical students.

What would you tell someone else looking at doing an internship at HAI?

I would recommend you look at all the different projects HAI is running at the moment on the website. This will give you an idea on which projects you would like to work on and if it fits with your own interest. For me, the topic of pharmaceutical promotion caught my attention, since I have encountered this myself when I look back at the four years that I studied chemistry. Contributing to a purposeful project is motivating, as well as the guidance that I receive from my supervisors. During the process of setting up and designing my research, I was given a lot of freedom which was a great learning experience to explore and develop myself.

What do you think is the single most important thing in this area at the moment and why?

I think the most important thing is to educate all medical students on the topic of pharmaceutical promotion within the university curriculum. Since this will promote the rational prescription of medicine, this means that patients will receive the appropriate medicines, in doses that meet their individual requirements, for an adequate period of time, and at the lowest cost both to them and the community.