

The Truth  *About Health*

DRUG COMPANIES SPEND BILLIONS TO LURE CONSUMERS INTO USING THEIR DRUGS

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Magazine ads for prescription drugs use vague claims instead of clinical data to appeal to consumers. The advertisements rarely explain a medication's expected benefit, but instead make an emotional appeal. This gives readers a perception that the drug has a broad benefit and that everyone who uses the drug will get the benefit.

Researchers found a key danger is that most of these ads "medicalize" common problems in the public's mind. A runny nose becomes allergic rhinitis. Indigestion becomes acid reflux or the worse-sounding GERD.

Direct-to-consumer advertisements are common in popular magazines, particularly those aimed at women. They all share a similar structure: they link the advertised product with its target condition and invite consumers to share in their own health management.

The first consumer magazine advertisement for a prescription drug was in Reader's Digest in 1981. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) became concerned about the potential effect of such advertisements on the public. As a result, in 1983, the FDA ordered a moratorium on advertising while it studied the subject and considered the regulatory options. They finally concluded that "direct to the public prescription advertising was not in the public interest."

Then, despite this conclusion, they lifted the moratorium in 1985.

Direct-to-consumer advertisement opponents worry that these advertisements will inappropriately increase patient demand for specific, costly drugs. There is also a concern that this demand will have a negative effect on medical practice and the physician-patient relationship.

Pharmaceutical companies spent \$1.8 billion on direct-to-consumer magazine advertisements for prescription drugs in 1999. At the same time, pharmaceutical companies reduced the amount spent on direct-to-physician advertising, which indicates a shift in their focus from physicians to patients.

SOURCE: http://www.balancedlives.net/notes_of_caution.htm#Dr.%20Joseph%20M