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Controversial Marketing Issues

Pharmaceutical Marketing – Write Up

            Much of the pharmaceutical industry advertises their products through television, prints, radio, etc. In order to keep the information relayed in these advertisements accurate, understandable and unabridged, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) created guidelines to regulate the industry’s direct-to-customer advertising (DTC).  “Under these guidelines, a company must commit to internal processes to ensure compliance with the principles, complete an annual certification of compliance, and submit a document to PhRMA signed by the CEO and chief compliance officer attesting to compliance” (University, pg. 1, 2013). Unfortunately, many of these guidelines are not followed, introducing the first wave of issues produced by this type of advertising. Companies are not self-regulating by way of PhRMA’s rules and the privilege of media advertising for pharmaceuticals is slowly becoming less of a marketing technique and more of a nuisance to both PhRMA and consumers.

            Direct-to-Consumer advertising communicates to the public about prescription medicines by increasing awareness about diseases and illnesses, educating patients about treatments, and motivating patients to contact their physicians to discuss health concerns (PhRMA, pg. 3, 2008). The FDA requires all DTC information to be accurate and not misleading, to be coherent with FDA labeling, and to reflect balance between risks and benefits. They also require DTC advertising to make claims only when supported by substantial evidence (PhRMA, pg. 4). As seen in our presentation, many pharmaceutical companies have bypassed these guidelines and were forced to either (A) produce new advertisements stating their mistakes and providing the correct information, or (B) pulling the advertisements from television altogether. Both these options are cumbersome and costly, so why are companies continuing to relay the wrong information in commercials?

            Pharmaceutical companies do not necessarily follow all of PhRMA’s guidelines the first time a commercial is in circulation because the amount of people reached outweighs is still significant enough to make a profit before they are found out. For example, “Arnold and Oakley studied the marketing campaigns for erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs over a four-year period, 2006 to 2010. These products include sildenafil citrate, manufactured and marketed as Viagra in the U.S. by [**Pfizer**](http://search.proquest.com.rlib.pace.edu/newsstand/docview/1288056841/fulltext/140945654F828828C3D/1?accountid=13044)” (University, pg. 1). According to the University of North Carolina, Pfizer’s Viagra campaign constantly violated five of PhRMA’s principles (University, pg. 2). The compliance of a company has not always been reliable even with the self-regulating guidelines (Arnold, Oakley, pg. 516). “… Organizations will carry out the self-regulatory commitments …  without legally enforceable sanctions for failures in compliance, self-regulatory systems are unlikely to be effective, especially with organizations that have a history of poor compliance with previous regulations” (Short and Toffel 2010). In this time, Viagra’s noncompliant commercial reached millions of men who fled to their doctor’s for advice about the product. Before the right commercial aired, many of these men were already using the product religiously and if they did not encounter any side effects, it did not matter what wrong information was relayed in the commercial. Many company’s noncompliance also resulted in children being exposed to pharmaceutical promotions. For example, commercials that use cartoons, animals, or other kid friendly techniques to sell drugs that are not necessarily aimed at children (e.g. Zoloft, Cymbalta, etc.)

            In conclusion, we find that Pharmaceutical advertising, although formally allowed in the United States, carries way more negative aspects than it does positive. Despite the rise of diseases diagnosed and sicknesses healed because of the rise in doctor’s visits, our research has also indicated that this type of advertising has introduces a disturbance in communications between the FDA, PhRMA and the advertising companies. It also breaches consumer-company trust in a product. Nonetheless, pharmaceutical advertising does and will probably continue to thrive due to the success rate of companies who market by way of television, radio or print media. Consumers are contributing to this success by buying pharmaceutical drugs over the counter, by way of prescription and sometimes, even on the black market because commercials are openly advertising what these drugs can be used for. So for the companies advertising, the pros outweigh the cons but for the consumers who are caught in the crossfire, the cons deserve some looking into.

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