

Understanding & Responding to Pharmaceutical Promotion

A Practical Guide for Educators & Students

28 July 2016

Overview

Medicines are a vital part of improving and maintaining people's health. Pharmacists, doctors and other healthcare professionals play a key role in ensuring medicines are prescribed properly and used rationally.

Concern exists, however, about the relationship between healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical industry—particularly the industry's influence on dispensing and prescribing decision-making. This influence may lead to sub-optimal treatment choices to the detriment of public health and unnecessarily escalate healthcare costs.

Rationale

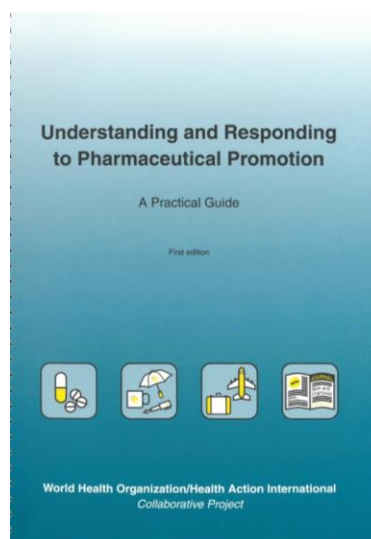
Many studies show that promotion influences how medicines are prescribed by doctors and used by patients. Health professionals often underestimate the power of this influence and rely upon promotional materials as information. This is dangerous because industry-sponsored promotional activities tend to show a company's medicine in a positive light. Research also shows that the influence of promotional material starts early in health professionals' academic training.

For this reason, the WHO and HAI conducted an international, cross-sectional survey to map educational initiatives that teach pharmacy and medical students about pharmaceutical promotion. The responses showed that, despite the responsibility entrusted to doctors and pharmacists to prescribe and dispense medical treatment, they receive little or no instruction on how to assess pharmaceutical promotion and understand its often subtle influence on their behaviour. The survey also found that a comprehensive educational resource on the topic was not available.

As a result, WHO and HAI created a new book, *Understanding and Responding to Pharmaceutical Promotion: A Practical Guide*, to educate students before they start prescribing and dispensing medicines.

Project goal

The guide trains students, in a practical way, how to recognise and respond to pharmaceutical industry promotional techniques. It also provides independent, reliable and unbiased sources for medicines information, as alternatives to pharmaceutical promotion.



Project description

HAI developed the guide in collaboration with the WHO. It is modelled on, and should be used as a companion to, the WHO's *Guide to Good Prescribing*. It represents a first step in preparing pharmacy and medical professionals for dealing with the effects of marketing on their decision-making.

Content of the guide

The nine-chapter guide was written by researchers, educators and healthcare professionals. Its thought-provoking content includes real-world examples of pharmaceutical promotion tactics, extensive chapter references, recommended readings, and engaging student exercises.

Chapter by chapter:

1. Promotion of medicines and patient health
Barbara Mintzes
2. Techniques that influence the use of medicines
Peter R. Mansfield
3. Analysing pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals
Joel Lexchin
4. Pharmaceutical sales representatives
Andy Gray, Jerome Hoffman and Peter R. Mansfield
5. Promotion to consumers:
Responding to patient requests for advertised medicines
Barbara Mintzes, Les Toop and Dee Mangin
6. Learning how not to do the pharmaceutical industry tango:
Raising student awareness of ethical conflicts of interest
Arthur Schafer and Nancy Olivieri
7. Regulation of pharmaceutical promotion: Why does regulation matter?
Lilia Ziganshina and Joel Lexchin
8. Using unbiased prescribing information
Andy Gray, Bob Goodman, José M. Terán Puente and Barbara Mintzes
9. Promotion, professional practice and patient trust
Dee Mangin

Approach

HAI promotes and distributes the guide, along with evaluation forms, to pharmacy, medical and other health-related academic institutions that express interest in teaching it. Our network of HAI academics and researchers also give lectures, presentations and workshops based on the guide's content to diverse audiences around the globe, as requested.

To order

The guide can be downloaded (in English, French, Russian and Spanish) on the HAI website: www.haiweb.org/what-we-do/pharmaceutical-marketing/guides. Educators may also request free hard copies (in English and Spanish) for themselves and students by emailing raquel@haiweb.org. The books are provided free of charge, but academic institutions are required to cover shipping costs.