

From: Odile Vergnoux [medical@actions-traitements.org]
Sent: 06 April 2008 20:55
To: NARHI Ulla (ENTR)
Subject: Contribution to the public debate on patient's information from pharmaceutical companies

This is my personal contribution to the debate (although I have already transmitted one through my professional organization, Actions Traitements, a french community association whose main task is to disseminate information to patients - and incidentally to health professionals- on AIDS and hepatitis treatment).

The reason I wish to contribute personally is linked to my professional background: from 1974 to 1993, I worked in the pharmaceutical industry in diverse positions, in marketing, medical departments, then in clinical research. During these last ten years (1992-1993), I had managerial positions in France then internationally (Europe). I really enjoyed this part of my career, but decided in 1993 to come back to the clinics and patient care, then (in addition), since 2002, to patients information in the community setting, in the most possible professional and objective manner (since I have also been trained in Clinical Pharmacology).

Pharmaceutical companies are searching new compounds and then try to promote them, which is perfectly normal and acceptable, and beneficial to patients.

In doing so, their main "customers" for prescription medicines are the physicians who prescribe the drugs.

It is the physician duty (not always a very easy one, since all of us are, in every aspect of our daily life, sensitive to promotional messages!) to have access, in addition, to independant information on treatments and to put in balance every possible source of information.

"Information" sourced from pharmaceutical companies cannot be expected to be independant, unbiased nor fully reliable. Some companies are more ethical than others in disseminating information on their products, but NONE has as main objective to promote a reasonable choice of drugs for a given patient, taking into account risk, benefit, and (ideally) cost. Their main objective is to increase sales and return on investment, and marketing departments are very powerful in doing so. Even patients organizations are considered as part of their "communication plan"!

If companies are given direct access to patients for prescription drugs, we will no doubt see a pressure coming from patients to physicians to prescribe the "attractive drug" they have heard of; physicians willing to have a good acceptance of treatment by their patients will not remain unsensitive to this argument. The main consequence will be a shift of prescription toward drugs which may not always be optimal for a given patient, but will almost certainly be the most recent and expensive ones (precisely the ones for which companies are able to invest big sums on promotional activities...)

It should be an ESSENTIAL DUTY of Health Public Services (national and EC level) to favour a proper use of the drug armentarium, at the best possible cost for health public resources already under severe constraints. One main tool (among others) is to protect patients from industrial drug information for prescription medicines, in the interest of patients themselves as well as public finances. Favouring a profitable pharmaceutical industry is certainly also important, but should not be seen as a primary objective by the EC in

this case.

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