Chapter 9

Negative Impact of Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Promotion on Indian Patients

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ABSTRACT

Direct to consumer promotion of pharmaceutical product is considered illegal in many parts of the world. But today patients have direct access to all possible information on the Internet. This chapter was conducted to study the beliefs of physicians regarding the negative impact of online information on patient behaviour as is being felt by the physicians in India. Belief of physicians was measured on a Likert Scale. For this purpose, a sample of 218 physicians was drawn based on cluster sampling from different cities in India. Null hypothesis was that there is no negative impact of DITC promotions on certain patient behaviour. The hypothesis was tested using one sample t test. The chapter shows that according to Indian physicians, direct to consumer promotion has negatively impacted the process of patient behaviour and their relationships with the physicians.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing of pharmaceutical products has remained under firm hold of ethical and legal norms. Direct advertising or any other form of direct promotion has been illegal in any or every country. India is not an exception to this. In fact in all over Asia there is no country which has given DTC in pharmaceutical industry a legal status. In India The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 prohibits promotion of diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or
prevention of any disease, disorder or condition specified in the Schedule, or any other disease, disorder or condition (by whatsoever name called) which may be specified in the rules made under this Act to general public. Violation of such an act is considered a cognizable crime in case of a first conviction invites imprisonment which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both. In case of subsequent conviction the imprisonment may extend to one year. According to the advertisements can only be sent to a registered medical practitioner by name or to a wholesale or retail chemist, the address of such registered medical practitioner or wholesale or retail chemist being given and such document should bear at the top, printed in indelible ink in a conspicuous manner, the words. “For the use only of registered medical practitioners or a hospital or a laboratory”.

Further in India medicines need to be sold strictly against prescriptions. No other health care practitioners such as nurses, pharmacists clinical psychologists can prescribe drugs.

Direct promotional efforts to patients are still limited to over the counter drugs which treat common symptoms such as fever, aches, cough and cold etc. With the revolution in the field of information technology, internet has become a great source of information. In the process the legal provisions banning direct-to-consumer promotions of medicines have been rendered paper feasts. Today patients have direct access to every possible details of their ailment and their treatment. Various sites of pharmaceutical companies are providing all relevant and perhaps irrelevant information to the patients. This direct promotional efforts of the pharmaceutical companies, for the promotion of pharmaceutical products is known as DTC or direct to consumer marketing. DTC is known as marketing of pharmaceutical products though this concept is used in other areas as well. In DTC, advertisement is towards patients not towards professionals related to healthcare. DTC advertising is done with the help of tools such as TV, print, radio and other mass media etc.

Is this development beneficial or detrimental? Particularly in the Indian context? Does it need to be regulated. These are some of the questions confronting society. A study was undertaken to identify potentially negative impact of DTC on patient behaviour.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a great discussion that direct marketing of the prescription drugs can be both harmful as well as beneficial for the customers. Many studies has been conducted in this regard. At one side many researchers in USA consider it as a valuable source of information but there are many who argue that it is potentially harmful for the customers. Auton (2004) argue that DTC advertising enrich customers by providing information about health problems, treatment options and medical advances. Peytrot et al. (1998) O’Brien (2008 march) found that branded DTC ads which clearly address the patient’s need are very few. He also argues that patients are more involved in DTC and are willing to discuss it with physicians. Robinson et.al (2004) stated that advertisement for a pharmaceutical product raises serious ethical concerns. They underrate risk, target the emotions of the patients and it is also adversely affecting the patient –physician relationship.(Adeoye and Bozic 2007). Scott Ehrlich found that Caduet, Crestor and Lipitor were among the few that used an on screen personality to deliver the risk information. Scott analysed that a closer look at broadcast DTC ads reveals that marketers are taking very different approaches to presenting details on risks and benefits. Christopher M. Schroeder outlined that Consumers are taking charge of their healthcare