

II. THE POSSIBLE IMPACT OF PHARMACEUTICAL PROMOTIONS UPON MEDICAL STUDENTS

To say that drug companies are successful in "buying the future physicians of America" is both without basis in fact and a slur on the professional ethics of a future generation of physicians. Rarely do students feel any obligation to the company that provided them with a particular instrument, book or service.

There can be little question, however, that promotion does make company names more familiar and that advertising can make brand names almost second-nature, especially when most available sources of information are based on company or brand-name distinctions.

Massive advertising campaigns certainly do influence medical students but only when conducted in the absence of reliable, unbiased and current drug information (such as the *Medical Newsletter*, or, hopefully, the *AMA Drug Evaluation*). The widespread use of the *Physician's Desk Reference* as the single source of information by medical students, house staff and faculty clearly creates a problem in regards to obtaining information with the previously mentioned characteristics. For two consecutive years, the SAMA House of Delegates has urged the AMA and/or the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to publish a suitable reference source. From the preliminary reports I have read, the *AMA Drug Evaluation* may indeed serve this purpose.

The naive feeling that medical students are at the mercy of the pharmaceutical industry in regards to the training in pharmacology and therapeutics overlooks several important points. These are:

1. The available basic information in these areas is increasing and each class of medical students is exposed to more complete mechanisms of action and therapeutic fundamentals;

2. The academic setting is the source of a large amount of the anticommercial and anti-drug company discussion and a few medical students are left unexposed to these criticisms;

3. University administrations are generally unsympathetic to drug promotions and most medical students are sequestered from detailmen throughout their medical school careers;

4. In many schools, gifts must be approved by the school administration before there can be any distribution of material;

5. Prescription-writing habits are generally developed by watching housestaff physicians write orders, who usually are limited by University formularies.

6. Today's medical students are more critical than ever before and questions concerning activity, efficacy and price are being asked with increasing frequency.

In summary, there is little question that promotions and advertising do have an effect upon medical students—in fact, the desired effect of company and brand-name familiarization; but with the increasingly critical nature of the medical student and the advent of reliable and unbiased sources of information, this effect will probably be minimized. Hopefully this can be done without losing the educational value of the promotions or advertisements which are a valuable adjunct to the educational process.

III. POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF PHARMACEUTICAL ADVERTISING ON THE QUALITY OF MEDICAL CARE

The most important effect of abuses in advertising and promotion is the misinformation directed at the physician and the resultant confusion about what drug to prescribe in a given situation. This type of abuse can easily be corrected by the development of an authoritative reference for physicians which while neutralizing misleading promotion would strengthen promotional efforts for new and valuable drugs.

The problem, as this committee well knows, is much broader than advertising or promotional practices of the drug industry. Abuses may also exist in research and developing, manufacturing and marketing. Poor quality drugs probably will have a much more profound effect on the quality of medical care than questionable advertising.

Examining the issue more broadly, health care is provided by a team of professionals, and abuses on the part of any member of the team should be actively exposed, carefully reviewed, and corrected with dispatch.

The problem which faces this committee, the medical profession, and the pharmaceutical industry is how to create mechanisms which serve to expose and limit abuses in all areas without stifling the creativity of active and competitive research, development, marketing, or the prerogatives of prescribing or dispensing.