

Approximately \$500 million a year are spent in prescription drug promotion. The large number of drugs marketed, the conflicting claims that each one is better than the others, the emphasis on brand names, the rapid introduction of new products that are always said to be better than the old ones, extensive detailing and the sheer bulk of advertisements in the mails, the media and in the medical journals -- all combine to give the doctor and the public a sense of frustration and confusion.

Other sources of drug information which are made available to the physician can also be improved. These include the scientific evidence for drug efficacy and the labeling information on the drugs he uses. Drug labeling is especially important since it sets the legal limits for drug promotion and advertising. The final report of the Drug Efficacy Study addresses itself to an appraisal of both and here I quote from the report. "The Drug Efficacy Panels expressed concern and surprise about the generally poor quality of the evidence of efficacy of the drugs reviewed and the poor quality also of the labeling of those drugs." The panels found that there was little convincing scientific evidence to support many of the cited indications for use of drugs that are currently in good standing in medical practice and criticized the labeling of about two-thirds of the drugs they evaluated as failing in their primary purpose of providing the physician and the pharmacist with balanced authoritative and objective guides to prescribing or dispensing the drugs in question.