

Ethical criteria for medicinal drug promotion

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Teaching medical students and doctors in training to critically analyze drug advertisements and drug promotional material is important. This booklet describes the criteria to be followed by drug advertisements and promotional material.

The book starts with a description of the resolution of the World Health Assembly regarding ethical criteria for medicinal drug promotion. The applicability and implementation of the criteria are briefly discussed. The booklet attempts to define the term 'promotion'. Promotion refers to all informational and persuasive activities by manufacturers and distributors, the effect of which is to induce the prescription, supply, purchase and/or use of medicinal drugs.

The criteria to be followed by advertisements in all forms to physicians and health-related professionals are described. The medical students in our institution use these criteria to analyze published drug advertisements and promotional material during the pharmacology practical sessions. The criteria to be followed by advertisements in all forms to the general public are also detailed. Direct to consumer advertising (DTCA) is not yet legal in South Asia but pharmaceutical companies do carry out awareness campaigns about common diseases.

Promotion of medicines by medical representatives (MRs) has been described. We teach students to optimize the time spent with MRs using the medium of role plays. The use of free samples of prescription and non-prescription drugs has been covered. The booklet mentions the broad criteria to be followed for sponsorship of symposia and conferences. Conferences in Nepal continue to be heavily

dominated by the industry and these criteria may be useful. The requirements for packaging and labeling are also covered.

Information for patients in the form of package inserts, leaflets and booklets is described. Package inserts are not mandatory by law in Nepal and most medicine packets do not contain one. The sample drug information sheet given at the end describes the various information such a sheet should contain.

The booklet should occupy a prominent place in the book shelf of all teachers of pharmacology and should be essential reading for all doctors and medical students.

About the book:

World Health Organization. Ethical criteria for medicinal drug promotion. Geneva: 1988.