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## **STRATEGIES IN PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING**

Vydehi Maheshwaram\*<sup>1</sup>, Srinivas Ampati<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Industrial Pharmacy, St.John College of Pharmacy, Yellapur(V), Hasanparthy(M), Telangana
2. Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, St.John College of Pharmacy, Yellapur(V), Hasanparthy(M), Telangana

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### **For Correspondence:**

**Vydehi Maheshwaram**  
Department of Industrial  
Pharmacy, St.John College  
of Pharmacy, Yellapur(V),  
Hasanparthy(M), Telangana

### **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of ethical criteria for medicinal drug promotion is to support and encourage the improvement of health care through the rational use of medicinal drugs.

WHO expanded its scope to people in all walks of life: governments; the pharmaceutical industry (manufacturers and distributors); the promotion industry (advertising agencies, market research organizations and the like); health personnel involved in the prescription, dispensing, supply and distribution of drugs; universities and other teaching institutions; professional associations; patients and consumer groups; and the professional and general media including publishers and editors of medical journals and related publication of the drug itself. According to WHO, Promotional materials for pharmaceutical products should be accurate, fair and objective and presented in such a way as to confirm not only to legal requirements but also to high ethical standards .

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The pharmaceutical industry is the world's largest industry due to worldwide revenues of approximately US\$2.8 trillion. Pharma industry has seen major changes in the recent years that place new demands on payers, providers and manufacturers.

Customers now demand the same choice and convenience from pharma industry that they find in other segment. Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is poised for high consistent growth over the next few years, driven by a multitude of factors. Top Indian Companies like Ranbaxy, DRL, CIPLA and Dabur have already established their presence.

The pharmaceutical industry is a knowledge driven industry and is heavily dependent on Research and Development for new products and growth. However, basic research (discovering new molecules) is a time consuming and expensive process and is thus, dominated by large global multinationals.

Indian companies have only recently entered the area. The Indian pharmaceutical industry came into existence in 1901, when Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Company started its maiden operation in Calcutta. The next few decades saw the pharmaceutical industry moving through several phases, largely in accordance with government policies. Commencing with repackaging and preparation of formulations from imported bulk drugs, the Indian industry has moved on to become a net foreign exchange earner, and has been able to underline its presence in the global pharmaceutical arena as one of the top 35 drug producers worldwide.

Pharmaceutical companies. Of the 465 bulk drugs used in India, approximately 425 are manufactured here. India has more drug-manufacturing facilities that have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration than any country other than the US.

Indian generics companies supply 84% of the AIDS drugs that Doctors without Borders uses to treat 60,000 patients in more than 30 countries.

The pharmaceutical industry develops, produces, and markets drugs licensed for use. Dosage forms are subject to a variety of laws and regulations regarding the patenting, testing and marketing of drugs.

Promotion of medicines, vaccines and biotech products is essential as it informs healthcare professionals about new treatment options, helping them receive appropriate training and provide the most suitable solutions for each of their patients.

The pharmaceutical sector is highly profitable and companies depend on expanding product sales in order to maintain their competitive edge. The proportion of total sales revenues allocated to marketing has been rising continually.

According to the estimates, the pharmaceutical companies spend approximately 35% of sales revenues on marketing, around double the proportion spent on research and development. Companies have increased the sheer level of promotional practices in response to increasing competitive pressures and new sophisticated promotional techniques which bypass current regulatory controls. Two-thirds of the world's countries either have no laws to regulate pharmaceutical promotion.

As pharmaceutical promotion and codes of conduct continue to evolve in the ever changing healthcare environment, a multi-stakeholder approach is crucial in ensuring that patients receive the best available care worldwide.

Pharma companies are in the business of making money; and they know that by providing gifts to doctors they can influence a doctor's prescribing habits and increase their market share.

Industrial associations all over the world such as Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA—US), The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI--UK), International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA—Geneva, the Apex body) and in India OPPI and IDMA have written down guidelines on 'ethical marketing practices.

The promotion of any irrational drug combination is bound to be unethical. The need of determining an ethical code of promotion of medicine is important. Many new drugs do not have any significant advantage over existing drugs. Many are produced with mere molecular manipulation to overcome a competitive edge and medicines with the same effect are sold at higher prices.

However, in India, samples of old drugs are regularly distributed in large quantities. In some instances sale packs are also used as samples and these packs do not even contain the words 'free sample'. There is no regulation on the giving of samples.

Some companies use the strategy of providing samples proportionate to the product's sales. This may lead to violation of ethics since samples should not be considered saleable.

### **Regulations in India:**

- In India, we have a Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954.
- It has only one relevant clause, Clause 4, on misleading advertisements
- which directly or indirectly gives false impression regarding the true character of the drug; makes a false claim for the drug.

### **Medical council of India guidelines:**

- The symbiotic relationship between the pharma industry and medical professionals has been in debate world over for several years now. Pharma companies have been giving gifts to doctors so that they prescribe their medicines, which was a smooth ride with some obstacles till now.
- But in a new amendment to the regulation under Section 33 of the Indian Medical Council (IMC) Act, the MCI has ordered that a medical practitioner shall not endorse any drug or product of the industry publicly, which will amount to removal of his/her name from the Indian Medical Register. This has brought the limelight on doctors and pharma companies once again.
- The recently published MCI regulations are aimed at improve the ethical standards in the medical profession and are expected to achieve the desired objectives.
- It is worth noting that within the pharma industry in India, Organisation Of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) came out first with its own new code of ethical marketing practices in 2007 for self regulation in this important area.
- In a country where there are over 10,000 manufacturers with sales revenue ranging from few crore of rupees to few thousand crore, promoting more than 70,000 brands, uniform implementation of such guidelines is a big challenge.
- The new MCI regulations are steps in the right direction, the pharma industry, by and large, does have an initial apprehension that very important and informative CME, which in turn could help the patients immensely, may get adversely affected with this new regulation and so are the areas involving medical/clinical research and trials. Senior medical professionals who are known for their ethics (and there are many) should come together and work out a strategy to stem this rot. MCI's new guidelines about accepting gifts, travel facilities, hospitality etc seems to have been rushed through without having a proper debate and is full of ambiguities. This not only gives scope for different interpretations but has potential for harassment of physicians due to internal rivalries.

**The WHO Ethical Criteria state that promotion of prescription and over-the-counter drugs:**

- Should be consistent with national health policies
- Should contain reliable claims, without misleading or unverifiable statements
- Should contain no omissions which could lead to health risks
- Should not be designed so as to disguise its real nature, for example as educational or scientific activities.
- The OPPI guidelines in this respect are: Adequate training should include information on basic medical sciences such as anatomy, physiology, microbiology and pharmacology.
- Sufficient medical knowledge should be given regarding aetiology and clinical aspects of the disease for which the product is used.
- The representatives should be properly trained to impart information in an accurate and scientific manner. There is no reference to the appropriate conduct of a medical representative (MR).
- The company may refuse to take responsibility for the claims or quality of the campaign made by an MR. Distribution of free samples
- The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) is a non-profit, non-governmental Organization (NGO) representing national industry associations and companies from both developed and developing countries.
- The Federation promotes and supports principles of ethical conduct and practices voluntarily agreed upon as exemplified by the IFPMA Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices. The IFPMA Code sets out standards for the ethical promotion of pharmaceutical products to healthcare professionals. The IFPMA code mentions that medical representatives must be trained with sufficient medical and technical knowledge. They should also collect information from professionals about the use of a product.
- The IFPMA code states that promotional activities within the scope of the code include direct to-consumer advertising, where this is permitted under local laws. In many Third World countries, no regulatory law for promotion of medicines exists. The IFPMA states that 'samples may be given to prescribing professionals to familiarize them with the products, enable them to gain experience with the products in their practice, or on request.

### **Pharma Marketing Process and its Challenges:**

While many pharmaceutical companies have successfully deployed a plethora of strategies to target the various customer types, recent business and customer trends are creating new challenges and opportunities for increasing profitability. In the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries, a complex web of decision-makers determines the nature of the transaction (prescription) for which direct customer (doctor) of pharma industry is responsible. Essentially, the end-user (patient) consumes a product and pays the cost.

From organizational perspective the most prominent performance related issues are enlisted below:

- a) Increased competition and unethical practices adopted by some of the propaganda base companies.
- b) Low level of customer knowledge (Doctors, Retailers, Wholesalers).
- c) Poor customer (both external & internal) acquisition, development and Retention strategies
- d) Varying customer perception.
- e) The number and the quality of medical representatives. Very high territory development cost.
- f) High training and re-training costs of sales personnel.
- g) Very high attrition rate of the sales personnel.
- h) Busy doctors giving less time for sales calls.
- i) Poor territory knowledge in terms of business value at medical representative level.
- j) Unclear value of prescription from each doctor in the list of each sales person.
- k) Unknown value of revenue from each retailer in the territory
- l) Absence of ideal mechanism of sales forecasting from field sales level, leading to huge deviations
- m) Absence of analysis on the amount of time invested on profitable and not-soprofitable customers and lack of time-share planning towards developing customer base for future and un-tapped markets.

### **Pharmaceutical Company Business Strategies:**

The company operates in niche formulations(**chronic**) segments such as psychiatry, cardiovascular, gastroenterology and neurology. While most of the top Indian companies have focused on antibiotics and anti-infectives(**acute**), Sun Pharma focused on therapeutic areas such as depression, hypertension and cancer. The company has introduced the entire range of

products and has gained leadership position in each of these areas. Being a specialty company insulates Sun Pharma from the industry growth. While the industry was affected to a large extent by a slowdown in the domestic formulations market, Sun Pharma logged a growth of 26% in revenues. Over the years Sun has also used the strategy of acquisitions and mergers to grow quickly. It acquired Knoll Pharma's bulk drug facility, Gujarat Lyka Organics, 51.5% in M. J. Pharma, merged TamilNadu Dadha Pharma & Milmet Labs and acquired Natco's brands. Post Merger with TamilNadu Dadha Pharma the company gained presence in gynecology and oncology segments.

**The bases of marketing strategies can be best described in these two models in both acute and chronic segments:**

(i) **Super Core Model** involving the search for, and distribution of a small number of drugs from Chronic Threapy Area that achieve substantial global sales. The success of this model depends on achieving large returns from a small number of drugs in order to pay for the high cost of the drug discovery and development process for a large number of patients. Total revenues are highly dependant on sales from a small number of drugs.

This model incorporates highly specialized approach in all the manner . Initially the competition is seems more at entry level but since growth is stable and more in this area ; every company is striving very hard to enter in this area. The major strategy in this model involves right focus to highly specialized customer by well trained team.

(ii) **Core Model** in which a larger number of drugs from Acute Threapy Area are marketed to big diversified markets. The advantage of this model is that its success is not dependant on sales of a small number of drugs. Here presenting a large number of product and taking the advantage of opportunity cost is one of the important strategy. Other strategy includes daily reminders to cross the perceptual filter and get the brand name in to the sub-conscious state of mind.

**Marketing approaches of Super Core Model:**

In pharmaceutical market there has been a significant shift from Acute towards Chronic Threapy area. Chronic segments are driving the growth of the market as leading prescribers in these segments are specialists as opposed to general practioners. This is evident from high growth rates achieved by firms like Sun Pharma, Dr.Reddy Laboratories and Dabur Pharma Ltd. Who have focused on these segments The doctor's prescription has become just the starting point in determining what drug the retailer dispenses. During last five years pharma companies have

started identifying the hidden potential of oncological market also. A number of drugs have been launched into the oncological market by pharmaceutical companies, including new biological drugs and drugs that can be used as a support for patients undergoing cytotoxic chemotherapy. As a matter of fact, pharmaceutical companies are merging, and, through the merging process, the portfolio of the new companies changes.

Medical representatives are rearranged throughout the new companies. Some of the sales representatives are now afraid of losing their job, due to the changing scenario and the possible lay offs. On the other hand, the new, bigger, pharmaceutical companies are competing more and more with one another, and, in order to stress their products, might adopt a more aggressive sales strategy. For example, sometimes in the same geographical area there are eight to ten representatives for just one company, or different representatives for the same drug in different settings. As a result of the new, aggressive strategy, the aggressiveness of representatives has also been increasing, since the larger stress exerted by their companies might affect their stay in the company. Therefore, they tend to have more frequent visits to encourage doctors to prescribe drugs and thus increase sales.

In this model medical representatives are the key actors for example in a small cardiology unit almost 40 sales representatives interacting with doctors, and most of them are coming for a visit on a regular once-a-month basis as this is the restriction put by doctors of meeting only once in a month that to on a fix time only, in order to stress the usefulness of their products and push clinicians towards the use of their drugs. This means that, basically, there are at least two representatives every day in busy clinic asking for a 'short' meeting to support their product.

Pharmaceutical marketing is a specialized field where medical representatives form the backbone of entire marketing effort. Pharmaceutical companies also appoint medical representatives and assign them defined territories. Medical representatives meet doctors, chemists and stockiest as per company norms. Medical representatives try to influence prescription pattern of doctors in favor of their brands.

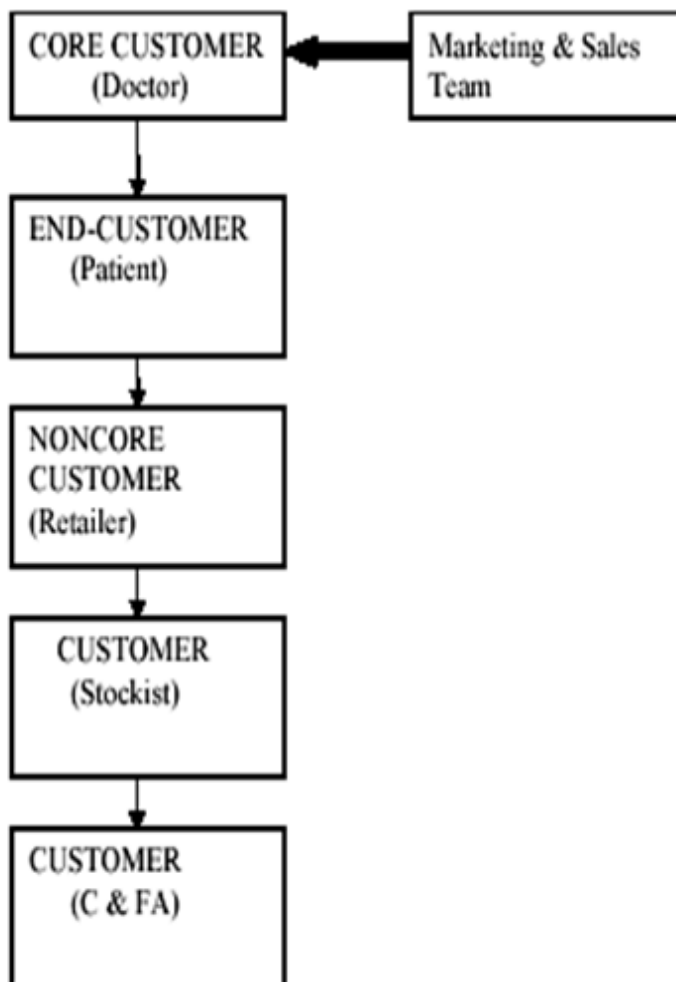
The pharmaceutical distribution channel is indirect with usually three channel members i.e. depot/C&F, stockiest and chemist. Pharmaceutical companies appoint one company depot or C&F agent usually in each state and authorized stockist(s) in each district across the country. Company depot/C&F sends stocks to authorized stockists as per the requirement. Retail chemists buy medicines on daily or weekly basis from authorized stockiest as per demand. Patients visit chemists for buying medicines either prescribed by a doctor or advertised in the media. Here



patient is end customer and doctor is direct customer for any pharmaceutical company. But for doctor customer (patient) is more important so he wants an effective supply chain management from prescribed company. And for pharmaceutical companies their customer that is doctor is more important that's why they emphasize more on supply chain management. Ultimately end customer is benefited out of this.

For marketing of these type of products companies require more and more skilled field force to develop good rapport with their direct customer(doctor). Moreover field force should have good product knowledge and USP of their products over other so as to convince doctors and **PULL** the demand for their products i.e. from Doctor to Retailer to Stockist to CFA to company.

Figure:1



**Pull System Working In Chronic Therapy Segment**

In this system, doctors are the core customers and the major thrust is given to build and retain these customer because they are pulling the demand for products hence companies also give main emphasis in building and retaining these customers. All efforts are being put for generating **secondary sales i.e.** from stockist to retailer. Ensuring of auto demand with limited availability and maximum liquidation of the products is the main characteristic of this approach.

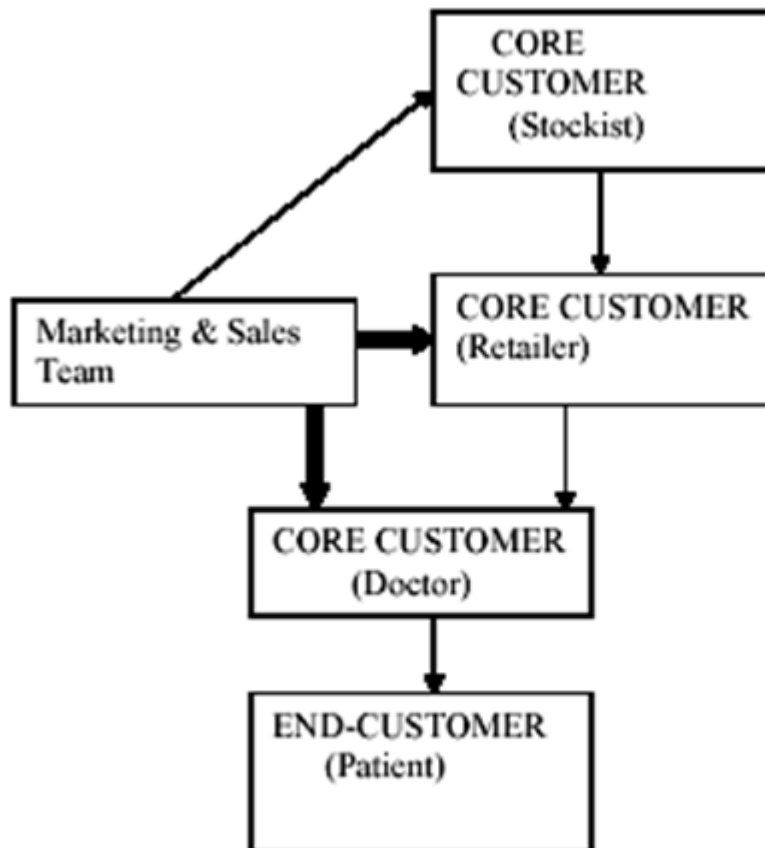
**Marketing approaches of Core Model:**

In present scenario companies are focusing more and more on the availability of products so as to enjoy good image in their customer's (doctors) chamber. Many companies such as Glaxo, Pfizer, Dabur, FDC, Aventies, and Cipla etc. are known for their availability of products. For marketing of these types of products companies require more and more field force to remind their products on daily basis to their direct customer (doctor). Moreover field force should have good knowledge of product schemes and offers. Also field force is required to have a good rapport with retailers. Field force also required to ensure good availability of their products to convince doctors and **PUSH** their products i.e. from to Stockist to Retailer to Doctor.

It has been observed that sometimes there are more than fifteen or sixteen representatives in a day are meeting with their customer and requesting for same type of products. Although field force visits are important for an update on drugs and their use. The doctors are, in general, sneaking away, trying to hide from sales representatives, since there are too many and they are too pushy and there is too little time, and the representatives probably have noticed that the reluctant doctors have always less time for short meetings and less interest and tend to reduce the time of the visit.

The relationship between clinicians and representatives has always been good and pharmaceutical companies have provided, and still provide, the major economical support for customers' continuous medical education. Something needs to be done to find a solution to this problem that takes into account the needs of both pharmaceutical companies and their representatives on one side and physicians on the other, for a better professional interaction.

Figure:2



### **Push System Working In Acute Therapy Segment**

In this system, doctors and retailers are the core customers and the major thrust is given to build and retain these customers. Here retailers are also core customer as most of the times they are substituting the products based on their own discretion. For retaining and developing customers, the companies normally provide utility gifts to remind the products on daily basis. Also it is interesting to note that since this is a push system products are being pushed in to the market so generally representatives place product orders from their stockist on the basis of SKUs sold and schemes. In this pumping the goods in the market and ensuring more and more **primary sales i.e. from CFA to Stockist and availability of goods are major strategies.**

Normally the chances of dumping of goods at stockist and retailer level are reported also payment recovery of companies is also not very good. Here the role of supply chain managers can be to provide considerable value to their companies by understanding the customers' delivery requirements. A very powerful tool for understanding these requirements is account segmentation.

A company can use account segmentation to identify market segments Such as Acute & Chronic therapy market. which is well positioned to serve and then organize its product range.

**Mass media promotions:**

Local physicians and hospitals use media like community newspapers or regional magazines to make consumers aware of their health specialty and location. Some doctors' practices and hospitals rely on public relations initiatives like local charitable golfing or running events to create awareness. Local health fairs are also usually staffed by local healthcare marketers, even though they're often funded by large pharmaceutical or insurance providers. The goal is to get directly in front of a patient population, conducting simple health indicator screenings such as cholesterol and blood pressure measurements and suggesting followup at their local facility as needed. Health fairs are often planned to coincide with other local events like parades or street fairs that attract a significant amount of foot traffic.

**Forms of advertising include:**

- Journals
- Direct mail & e-mail
- Bill boards
- Newspapers
- TV
- Radio
- Salespeople (dealers and wholesalers)
- Newsletters
- Directories & reference books (PDR)
- Electronics (video material, internet)
- Mass advertising is still the most effective and efficient way to get a message out to the largest number of people. Both big pharmaceutical and big insurance companies use mass advertising as a primary marketing channel. Pharmaceutical companies primarily utilize television and magazine media while insurers tend to use primarily direct mail and TV to a lesser extent.
- One requirement of drug advertising is the disclosure of potential adverse effects from use of the drug product in the ad. In print, marketers are required to provide very detailed information on their product including chemical makeup, usage, and adverse side effects, right alongside the positive benefits of using the drug. In broadcast media, because of

time limitations, manufacturers only need to verbalize adverse side effects. Too long a list of negative side effects can dissuade a consumer from using a drug. In such a situation, marketers have to weigh whether they should advertise directly to consumers or only to physician

**Direct to consumer advertising (DTCA):**

- Used mainly for a group of drugs called: Life style drugs
- “Care for the patient is best served by care for the patient”
- “Educate and sell at the same time”

Issues raised by DTC ads:

- Public health.
- Corporate responsibility.
- Advertising ethics.
- Consumer capacity to understand complex medical information.

DTC ads are allowed in US and New Zealand only.

DTC ads concentrate on powerful emotional factors such as:

- Value of one’s health or loved ones.
- Fear of death.
- Fear of disability.
- Responsibility of taking care of one’s health and that of loved ones.
- Self consciousness
- Shame.
- Vulnerability of people who are aging.
- No mention of non-pharmacological alternatives to treatment in these ads.
- DTC ads are claimed to increase patient compliance.
- DTC ads are claimed not to interfere with doctor / patient relationship and to enhance there communication with them.
- 1\4 people who visited doctors after a DTC received a new diagnosis of a conditions.
- Knowledgeable patients are usually treated better by doctors and pharmacists which results in a better care outcome.
- In newspapers or TV
- Due to these ads, doctors are more willing to prescribe drugs that patients request and on the other hand, patients are more aware of their problems.

**Two types of advertisements:**

1. General health message (no mention of drug's name).
2. Product - specific ads.

Elements of a pharmaceutical product contributing to its advertising profile:

- The name
- The image
- The price
- The presentation
- The acceptance

**Types of DTC advertisements:**

- **Help seeking:** these ads aim to alert consumers about a disease or condition and its symptoms and let them know that treatment is available. A drug's brand name cannot be used, but the company sponsoring the ad is identified. People are exhorted to see their doctor.
- **Reminder Ads:** these ads give the name of a drug but do not mention any disease or condition to be treated. They are designed to build brand recognition and prompt people to ask their doctors about the drug.
- **Product claim:** these ads mention both a drug's brand name and its intended use. They aim explicitly to prompt people with a specific disease or condition to go to the doctor to inquire about the drug. Such ads must meet more exacting requirements. Most DTC drug ads today are product claim ads.

**TV advertising guidelines for OTC products:**

- Present no information in a manner that suggests the product prevents or cures a serious condition that must be treated by a licensed practitioner
- Emphasize the uses, results and advantages of the particular product
- Reference to no doctors, hospitals, or nurses unless such representations can be supported by independent evidence
- Present no negative or unfair reflections about competing nonprescription drug products, unless those reflections can be supported scientifically, and presented in a manner so consumers can perceive differences in the uses

**Online marketing:**

The Internet has proven itself an invaluable tool for all healthcare marketers. Local physicians use online advertising or submissions to search engines and directories to

ensure they will be found during a local web search. Hospitals, too, have online presences in websites that act as digital brochures. Drug companies and insurers establish websites both for physicians and for patients to visit. The Internet allows drug makers to explain a disease condition thoroughly, using renderings and real-life patient cases, to provide answers to frequently asked questions and to offer a means to contact the maker, an insurer or a local physician. Insurers' websites give detailed descriptions of plans, coverage and benefits.

**Sampling:**

Sampling is a marketing strategy pharmaceutical companies use to help patients experience their products for free. First, pharmaceutical companies approach physicians, and ask them if they would like product samples. The physician can then hand out samples to patients who are affected by the condition the drug is indicated for. Sampling allows pharmaceutical companies to gain brand awareness among physicians and consumers.

**Publications:**

Advertorials are advertisements with editorial content that can help educate the public about the benefits of your products. Place advertorials in consumer magazines that attract readers in your target demographic.

Pharmacy journals are an applicable source of publicity because pharmacists and other health care professionals read them. Suggest your company be a feature story for an upcoming issue, volunteer to be interviewed, or send the journal a press release about new and soon to be released products

**Strong Sales Force:**

Pharmacists, hospital personnel, physicians, patient advocacy groups and even retirement homes that purchase pharmaceutical products need special attention from a professional sales force. Increase the visibility of your company's products and volume of sales with a staff that has the stamina to keep up with a fast-track vocation in pharmaceutical sales.

Create a team of sales representatives who are self-starters, possess business competencies and show an interest in medicine. Select from candidates with a health care background if possible because it can improve a company's credibility. Excellent people skills are a must as your reps will need to be persistent as well as friendly when dealing with busy medical professionals.

### **eDetailing:**

- eDetailing is a marketing strategy pharmaceutical companies employ to connect with physicians and other health care professionals online. eDetailing allows the physician to schedule an appointment to talk to a pharmaceutical representative about drug and disease state information online rather than seeing a pharmaceutical sales representative in person. This saves time for both the physician and the drug company and allows for a more in-depth conversation, since the physician is meeting with the representative on his own time, rather than having to hear an unexpected presentation in his office while he is trying to tend to patients.

### **2.CONCLUSION:**

The pharmaceutical industry's economic influence on the medical field is substantial. Of the five marketing tactics discussed in this study, physicians-targeted promotions and direct-to-consumer advertising present the least potential harm to patients because, although there is the possibility of being exposed to unnecessary health risks, the quality of patient care generally remains the same, only patients end up spending more on expensive drugs and extra doctor visits. Pharmaceutical companies' unethical recruiting of doctors potentially poses a greater risk, the extent of which depends on the individual doctor's morality. The greatest harm that could come from this marketing practice is the reporting of unreliable data, either because of researchers' conflict of interests or the manipulation of data; ethical doctors cannot make sound judgments about the most effective treatments for their patients if the information that they receive is skewed. Should this trend continue, patients could end up suffering from unreliable or even dangerous treatments and drug therapies. There is, however, time to correct these problems.

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