



Pharmaceutical Sales representatives

July 2014

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Acknowledgements:

- Andy Grey, HAI Member, Author Chap 4
- Jerome Hoffman, HAI Member, Author Chap 4
- Peter Mansfield, HAI Member, Author Chap 4

Financial disclosure:

- No pharmaceutical or advertising industry funding
- Funding for my position: DFID, UK; DG Sanco, EU

Outline:

- Visits by Sales Reps
- Should they happen?
- Samples
- Gifts
- Selection of Sales Reps
- Training of Sales Reps
- Information from Sales Reps
- Engagement
- No Thanks!

Rep Visits

- Contact and the potential for gifts starts early
- Pre-clinical to clinical setting (33% - 72% over 20 exposures)
- Sponsored events, gifts, free meals, samples, pizza, beer, textbooks, pocket texts
- Range from a pen to \$800 travel bursary
- Small gifts are highly prized by students

Sales Reps

- Money would not be spent if it was not beneficial to the company
- Reps can be invited to address students
- Provide Food & Drink
- Primarily one-on-one
- Marketing budget – 90,000 reps, USD10 Billion
- Free Samples
 - Less choice for poor patients

Should Health Professionals Meet Reps

- Challenges professional integrity and time management.
- Data suggest Healthcare professionals will act contrary to duties owed to the patient.
- Ideally, might both interact with reps and also do the research counteract commercial bias.
- Time that might better be spent in other activities.
- See representatives for free samples?
- Divestment

Should Health Professionals Meet Reps

Physicians ought to refuse to visit with representatives as a matter of both professional integrity and sensible time management (Brody, 2005).

- Useful information
- Free samples that can be given to patients
- Gifts

'Benefits' would have to be balanced with biased information and other 'risks'

Free Samples

- Industry contributes large numbers of samples
- Promotional tool used to influence prescribers and dispensers and to increase the sales of new (and often expensive) medicines.
- Physicians who provide samples to poor patients may find that they have chosen sub-optimal medicines simply because they were available.
- After such samples run out, these patients - who almost invariably are continued on the expensive brand- name products - end up paying much more for their medicines

Gifts

- Denial that gifts work
- Transparency cures all....
- Creates a relationship – size of gift irrelevant
- Reciprocity
- In the end, prescribers and dispensers are spending someone else's money
- Even in our personal lives we make irrational purchases because of gifts

Selecting Sales Reps

- sales representatives are chosen for their ability to build relationships.
- Lamberto Andreotti, President of Worldwide Pharmaceuticals for Bristol-Myers Squibb:

"Obviously, people hired for the work have to be extroverts, a good conversationalist, a pleasant person to talk to; but that has nothing to do with looks, it's the personality." (Saul, 2005).

- No mention of the scientific training necessary to provide what is claimed by pharmaceutical companies to be primarily an educational and scientific task

Training Sales Reps

- Intensive training on selected aspects of the products they promote
 - to criticise competitors' products
 - to handle objections or difficult questions that their customers may pose
 - coached to change the subject
 - may cover the code of conduct
 - Sales representatives are rewarded for sales

"I wonder today, more than ever before, how am I to continuously keep finding that tiny little spot in my customer's mind to absorb and accept my product message, so that I can get the prescriptions that any pharma marketer so earnestly works for."

Information from Reps

- Sales representatives are hired to sell products regardless of whether the products they are as good as or better than those of competitors
- There is good evidence that the information provided by pharmaceutical sales representatives is incomplete, and biased
- A lack of balance in the information provided, with greater emphasis on purported benefits at the expense of side effects, contraindications and interactions
- They may also extend or change the indications that are presented, promoting use of the medicine in conditions for which it is not registered.

In Summary

- Influence on prescribing
- Specific Techniques
- Entitlement
- Obligation
- Effect of free samples

Is it possible to engage critically?

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No thanks!

- Personal crusade
- Healthy Skepticism
- Health Action International
- PharmedOUT
- Sign a 'No Thanks Charter' (Prescrire and HAI)

“It is said that gifts persuade even the Gods.”