

Chapter 9

An Empirical Note on Comparative Perceptions of Indian Patients and Physicians in Direct-to- Consumer Promotion of Pharmaceutical Products

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ABSTRACT

Direct promotion of pharmaceutical products to patients is not legal in India. Internet healthcare websites, however, have rendered this law moot. Patients today increasingly flock to websites to find health-related information. With the help of a survey involving 400 patients and 200 physicians, this chapter attempts to identify the differences in the perception of physicians and patients. The results indicate that major differences exist in the beliefs held by physicians and patients vis-à-vis merits and demerits of DTC-promotion through health-related websites. As patients and physicians operate as a team while health-solutions are made available to the patients, such major differences in their beliefs regarding the merits and demerits of DTC-promotion may result in emergence of fault lines in their relationship. An exploratory factor analysis has been conducted to confirm if the underlying variables measure the latent factors or not. Regression model has been developed to measure the impact of information perception on patient-physician relationship.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7095-0.ch009

INTRODUCTION

Marketing of pharmaceutical products has remained under firm hold of ethical and legal norms. Direct advertising or any other forms of direct promotion of pharmaceutical products have been illegal in any or every country including India¹. These advertisements can only be sent to a registered medical practitioner by name or to a wholesale or retail chemist, the address of such registered medical practitioner or wholesale or retail chemist being given and such document should bear at the top, printed in indelible ink in a conspicuous manner, the words “For the use only of registered medical practitioners or a hospital or a laboratory”.

Further in India medicines need to be sold strictly against prescriptions issued by registered medical practitioners only not by other health care practitioners such as nurses, pharmacists or clinical psychologists.

Direct promotional efforts to patients are still limited to over-the-counter drugs which treat common symptoms such as fever, aches, cough and cold etc. With the revolution in the field of information technology, internet has become a great source of information. In the process the legal provisions banning direct-to-consumer promotions of medicines have been rendered mere paper feasts. Today patients have direct access to every possible detail of their ailment and their treatment as various web-sites of pharmaceutical companies provide all relevant and perhaps irrelevant information also to the patients. This direct promotional effort of the pharmaceutical companies, for the promotion of pharmaceutical products is known as DTC or direct to consumer marketing. Internet based DTC advertisement mainly concentrates towards patient's not related healthcare professionals.

How do patients and physicians view such a development? Is there a significant difference in their perception on the efficacy, benefits, disadvantages and problems associated with this newly emerging phenomenon? This is an important issue as differences in perception may result in newer conflict-points between patients and physicians. This paper comprehensively addresses the issue.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a great discussion that direct marketing of the prescription drugs can be both harmful as well as beneficial for the customers. Many studies have been conducted in this regard. At one side many researchers in USA consider it as a valuable source of information but there are many who argue that it is potentially harmful for the customers. Auton (2004) argue that DTC advertising enriches customers by providing information about health problems, treatment options and medical advances. *Peytrotetal (1998) and O'Brien Anne (2008) found that branded DTC ads which clearly address the patient's need are very few.* He also argues that patients are more involved in DTC and are willing to discuss it with physicians. Robinson et.al (2004) stated that advertisement for a pharmaceutical product raises serious ethical concerns. They underrate risk, target the emotions of the patients and it is also adversely affecting the patient – physician relationship. *Scott Ehrlich found that Caduet, Crestor and Lipitor were among the few that used an on-screen personality to deliver the risk information. Scott analyzed that a closer look at broadcast DTC ads reveals that marketers are taking very different approaches to presenting details on risks and benefits.* Christopher M. Schroeder(2010) outlined that Consumers are taking charge of their healthcare like never before. They are doing more research before a doctor visit, more closely monitoring their doctor's recommendations and consulting with friends and family to validate their decisions. Jha (2005) suggested that DTC is an important variable in pharmaceutical marketing in Indian

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