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Letter To Editor

Unethical Pharmaceutical Promotion: Now It Is Time To Act *

SHAH V*

*Dr. Viral Shah, Senior resident, department of endocrinology, Postgraduate institute of Medical Education and research, Chandigarh, (India).

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Viral Shah

Senior resident,

Department of Endocrinology,

Postgraduate institute of medical education and research, Chandigarh, (India).

E-mail: viralshah_rational@yahoo.co.in

Phone- 09872308785.

It was a very interesting article by Masood I [1]. The article has highlighted various issues on pharmaceutical promotion as industry and professional perspective. I want to share my opinion about the pharmaceutical promotion.

The interaction between pharmaceutical companies and physicians are not new. It is since the time of Hippocrates, it has been major concern [2]. Such issues had been discussed even in 1850s [3]. As highlighted by authors that in this era, number of pharmaceutical companies (PC) flooded market with numerous products and therefore there is increase in supply versus demand. Therefore, in the fierce competition, they (PC) want to increase their cell by any means leading to unethical promotions, and deviation of their original aim of creating awareness about their product to enforcing physicians to prescribe.

India has a large pharmaceutical industry. A major expansion started in the early 1970s when the Indian government took two decisions. Firstly, it decided to permit domestic manufacturers to produce generic versions of patented molecules without permission from overseas innovators—provided a different

manufacturing process was employed. Secondly, small scale pharmaceutical units were eligible for huge fiscal incentives and state subsidies. The new policy led to an unprecedented growth of medicine makers. Today an estimated 17 000 pharmaceutical companies produce over 40 000 branded formulations, many times more than the rest of the world [2].

Does it mean that number of sufferer has increased in India? Agree, that there is increase in education; public awareness and availability of health centers in rural India have brought many diseases in focus. However, the rather than increase in number of patients, increase in number of drugs in a prescription seems to be important factor behind the huge profitable phrama business.

There are codes of conduct promoting the product as mentioned by Masood in his article. However, Gulati [3] was right in saying that no codes work for the promotion; it is 3 Cs that work. 3 Cs stands for Convince, confuse and corrupt. One step ahead, I would like to say only one C works that is to corrupt because it is very difficult to convince or confuse the gray haired and gray matter professionals.

The ways to curb the problem lies at three levels. One is educating the consumer; the patients, two educating the professional and regulating the pharmaceutical companies. I hope rather than blaming others, we should think of our moral duties for which medical profession is considered to be most respectful and noble.

Recently Medical Council of India (MCI) has amended the Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics Regulations, 2002 [4] for the medical

professionals in India to curb the unethical pharmaceutical promotions. But the million dollar question is do these regulations will solve the problem? I think, until and unless we, the medical professionals decide and stop unethical practice for the sake of money; nothing will work. Another question, who should take the lead? Medical associations? MCI? Government authorities? Solution starts with the word "I", we our self should be determined to stop unethical promotions to maintain the dignity of our profession. Otherwise as the time goes, this noble profession will become business and we all are today considered to be next to god will become businessmen of tomorrow. Now, I think it is time to act!

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