EMERGING TRENDS OF UNETHICAL PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT
Marketing of Pharmaceutical products is a very vast field after their production in the Pharmaceutical Units. Pharmaceutical industry of every country contains its own marketing unit. The objective of the present work was to highlight various illegal ways that are adopted in Pakistan to promote one’s product in market. A questioner containing 19 questions was designed regarding unethical marketing i.e. who is responsible for Unethical marketing; its impact on the purchase of brands, tools used for it and Doctor’s Views about sales promotion officers (SPO’s) etc. Study was conducted in 400 doctors of Pakistan. Survey highlighted that 50% of the doctors prescribe medicines on the basis of their self-experience, 73% declared that they keep patient compliance in their minds while prescribing rather than personnel benefits. 35% of the doctors consider themselves for the unethical marketing while 46% declare pharmaceutical companies as major culprit for this act. 46% of the doctors showed that national companies invest more on them rather to invest on product. 56% of doctors said that samples are most frequently used promotional tool. Due to this unlawful practice excellent quality products are losing their markup value in market. Moreover, it will result in poor patient compliance, large impact on patient’s economical status and provision of poor medical treatment to population. This will only be possible when role of Pharmacist is implemented in the profession. There should be proper, strict check and balance on the prescription written by Medical officers. Role of Pharmacist should clearly be implemented. Pharmacist along with duties of care giver should provide excellent knowledge and way of ethical marketing of drugs.

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INTRODUCTION

The Pharmaceutical Industry is a multi-discipline industry with several rules, regulations, laws and strict governance in order to maintain the safety and the health ratio of the people. This industry follows strict control in every single step of R&D, production as well as the post-production i.e. its release into the market and ultimately its consumption. Relaxation in any single step results in major losses to the industry, public health and the country at large. It is the primary responsibility of the industry, the respective Government and also the people to follow the regulations and laws of the pharmaceutical industry. These regulations also cover marketing departments of this industry and their activities [1, 2].

Physicians and pharmacists are the most important members of health care providing system. Different drugs are available for the treatment of diseases as a primary tool and physicians and pharmacists are responsible for the selection of brands. Therefore knowledge about old and newer drugs is necessary for the physicians. The information relevant to a new drug is generally reaches to the physicians through sales representatives, brochures, banners etc. which are arranged by the marketing department of pharmaceutical industry [3]. Physicians are the personals who are directly responsible for the sales of pharmaceuticals. They write the prescription for the patients. Patient is bound to take medicine according to such prescription. So physician is a key in pharmaceutical sales. Different pharmaceutical companies use different methods and strategies to attract physicians in favor of their brands by various means i.e. gifts, samples, and sponsorships etc. [4].

Since last decade, pharmaceutical industries through sales representatives have access to the physician’s prescriptions. As a result they become aware to the need of market and thus focus on such drugs which are most repeatedly prescribed [5, 6, 7]. American Medical Association (AMA) and other medical associations have given a number of suggestions to reduce the use and distribution of physician’s prescription data [8]. The result of most of researches is that unethical marketing is going on around the world but these are more common in backward countries. It is also followed in pharmaceutical marketing. Such practices are very dominant in Pakistan’s pharmaceutical companies. In these circumstances it becomes necessary part of pharmaceutical industry in marketing to survive and compete with the market.

The present article describes a detailed survey conducted in 400 doctors of Pakistan. Some critical conclusions could be derived after the survey, which need to be highlighted upon. In short, the ethical and scientifically produced marketing help the society while unethical or mischievous ones are very dangerous. The aim and objectives of conducting present survey was

a) To know the promising tools that result in unethical marketing of the drugs.

b) To carry out a survey among doctors to find out culprits responsible for unethical practices.

c) To check the impact of unethical pharmaceutical marketing on the drug purchase & use of the same.

d) To highlight the role of Pharmacist where it is being neglected.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was carried out among the doctors of Pakistan. The total sample size was of 400. Doctors (400) were selected from both general physicians and specialists from all over the country. A questionnaire was developed and distributed among Doctors. The questionnaire was having 19 questions for Doctors to evaluate who is responsible for unethical marketing. Such questionnaire was distributed among the prescribed personals. Results were presented by applying statistical tools.

RESULTS

Different questions were asked from general physicians and specialist doctors to know that who is responsible for unethical practices in pharmaceutical marketing. Only 25% of SPO satisfies queries about new promotional drugs. More than half physician & consultants favor the factor for prescribing a newly launched drug is cross matching of literature. Results have also showed that 50% of physicians justified themselves for sale promotion officers and the factor which inspires them for SPO (Sales Promotion Officer) attendance is ethical attitude. Approximately 3/4 of doctors replied that they prefer multinational companies for their prescription on the basis of brand effectiveness, quality of the life in contrast to cost factor, company’s standards or personal financial benefits as shown in figure1.

![Figure 1: Doctor’s sayings about various questions](image-url)
Pharmaceutical industries use different promotional tools like samples, giveaways, novelties, patient aids and medical exhibitions to attract the doctors. Most of the doctors (84%) said that samples are most frequently used by the industries as promotional tool and they are also satisfied with their marketing as shown in figure 2.

But majority of doctors explore the fact that only 50% of samples are given to the patients. 226 (56%) doctors out of 400 said that they prescribe medicine on the basis of self-evaluation without considering the image of company (13%), literature survey (24%), and personal relation (4%) as shown in figure 3.
73% doctors replied that they only keep in mind patient compliance at the time of prescription not financial benefit, personal relations or satisfaction as shown in following figure 4. Majority of doctors (75%) think that Pharmacological leaflets helps them to evaluate the drug as shown in the table No.1.

Table No.1 Literature for drug evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Anatomical charts</th>
<th>Photographic representations</th>
<th>Pharmacological leaflets</th>
<th>General info</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results at the end we conclude that 35% physicians believe that they are main culprit for unethical drug promotion but 46% physicians summarized that unethical practice is due to pharmaceutical companies as shown in following table 2.

Table No. 2: Main culprits in unethical drug promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culprit</th>
<th>Doctors</th>
<th>Pharmacists</th>
<th>Pharmaceutical Company</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>No response</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

The pharmaceutical industry's purpose in giving drug samples may be to let the GPs (General Physician’s) become acquainted with the drugs by ‘testing’ them on their patients. Our results have shown that samples are the first choice of the industries to attract doctors. Samples provide financial benefits to the prescriber in addition to the drug related information. A large number of similar studies had been done in various countries which show that this way is a key promotional tool [9, 10, 11].

Pharmaceutical industries are fully involved in these unethical practices as they use different promotional tools most prominently Medical exhibitions and means to achieve their targets. Similar sort of study was conducted by Pogo et al., 2006 in which they have used unethical means to force or influence Doctors to prescribe their products [12].

More than 50% of the prescribers prescribe medicines to the patients on the basis of self-experience and keeping in mind the patient compliance without considering benefits of pharmaceutical industry while opposite kind of study was conducted in Nepal in which prescription of the actively and unethically promoted medicines was done by the Doctors. The difference comes in results might be due to that our study was based on different Doctors of this locality while that study was based on Pharmaceutical industry [13].

Half of the doctors reported that majority of the sales officers satisfy them by answering their questions with solid reasons regarding their product i.e. efficacy, safety, drug profile, toxicity studies and price of their product. Periodic but regular visits of the sales officers enable doctors to absorb knowledge regarding the product and it is also important for the promotion of the product.

About 25% doctors have said that their queries, investigations and questions about new drug products are well entertained by the sales promotion officer. When the pharmaceutical firm is going to launch new drug product in the market of competitors than SPO’s for this product have to explain all the positive advantageous as well as harmful effects of their product as alternative or competitor of existing brands for the rapid and solid promotion of their product.

It is necessary to give knowledge about use and actions of new drug not only to patients but also to the care givers that require proper psychoanalysis [13].

75% of the doctors declared that they use to prescribe drugs of multinational pharmaceutical companies by keeping in view the product quality, safety, efficacy and effectiveness. They prefer patient health and compliance over the cost of the product and also prefer multinational drug products over the product of national companies. By doing this they are providing quality products to their patients thereby improving their health instead of prolonging treatment duration or giving unethical benefits to the pharmaceutical company.

Majority of the doctors think that product samples, giveaways affect them to prescribe quality medicine to the patients and to help the poor public by giving quality product in the forms of samples. Leaflets prove to be good source of information regarding the product in the absence of SPO’s.

Multinational companies invest more and more in the introductory phase of the drug product in the market as they have invested a lot in their R & D department for the new product and they don’t want that their product may be kicked out from the market of competitors.

Majority of the doctors claimed that these are national pharmaceutical companies who use bonuses or incentives i.e. money, tours etc. for the promotion of their product which lead to unethical practice in this noble profession. They used to make the specific product on every patient’s prescription only for their benefits and benefits of the company for which they are even paid directly and cherished tours are arranged for prescriber and for his/her family.

About 35% of the population of the doctors stands them in culprits that are promoting the unethical practices and are playing with the lives of the innocent public. Here doctors have the authority to prescribe and there are no evaluation services of the product for price, toxicity, duplicity etc. by Pharmacists as per rules of the ministry of health of Pakistan.

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46% of doctors said these are national companies that invest more on doctors as compared to their product. Companies focus on doctors who have power to prescribe even wrong medicine to the patients which they don’t require at all. Thus from such study it is concluded that pharmaceutical companies are mainly responsible for unethical pharmaceutical marketing. Doctors are also responsible for it but their role is less as compared to pharmaceutical companies because these companies influence the doctors for prescribing medicines by using different tools as discussed above.

After doing this we suggest that unethical practices should be banned not even in Pakistan but also all over the world. It will result in poor patient compliance, large impact on patient’s economical status and provision of poor medical treatment to population. This will only be possible when role of pharmacist will be implemented in this profession. There should be proper, strict check and balance on the prescription written by Medical officers. Otherwise it will be hazardous (not receiving quality medicines) not to the ill population but also to the economic resources (high price for low quality products) of the country.

References