



## **Office Visit: Misleading marketing confusing**

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By David Holden, MD

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Depressed? Want to lose 20 pounds overnight? Stop heartburn before it starts? We've seen and heard all the commercials and read all of the ads. No matter your illness or condition, there's likely a magic pill or procedure available offering a cure. The commercials are usually followed by a list of about 100 complications that often sound worse than your actual condition. In the current day of medical and pharmaceutical companies marketing directly to consumers, the age-old adage of buyer beware couldn't be more relevant.

While most patient direct marketing still refers consumers to see their doctor, most of it is designed to convince patients that they not only need pills for their condition, but one particular pill. Armed with what is sometimes incomplete or inaccurate information, patients ask their physicians for a specific pill.

Last week, The New York Times reported on a study that detailed unpublished data from Pfizer, describing how one of its products is ineffective and potentially harmful. The report went on to accuse the company of misleading consumers, physicians and regulators.

In the age of information, I am the biggest advocate for patients doing their own research and being informed. But more often than not, through marketing and a patient's own research, it's difficult to process small amounts of information and apply it to one's situation.

The ads manipulate the physicians, as well. Pharmaceutical companies provide more than \$8 million in free samples annually. Today's physician is busier than ever, seeing more patients in less time. It's often easier to dispense the free samples and write a prescription than to engage, diagnose and educate the patient on the best treatment for their condition.

As a physician, 75 percent of my job is to educate my patients. It's my job to do what a 30- or 60-second commercial can't provide – a full understanding of their situation. It's just as important as implementing the treatment course. If a patient is confused or is feeling misled, I spend additional time with them until they are comfortable and have a complete understanding of their particular situation.

As patients, you can't ignore all the messages coming at you from the pharmaceutical and medical community, and you shouldn't. Being an informed consumer is critical, but don't count on television and magazine advertisements to tell you the whole story. Make sure to conduct your own credible research and, most importantly, engage your physician. Patient history and a physical exam are 90 percent of what leads to an accurate diagnosis.

Dr. David Holden is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon and currently serves on the board of directors with McBride Clinic, Inc in Oklahoma City.