

News Roundup

Only 6% of drug advertising material is supported by evidence

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THIS REPORTER NOTES:

"A new study of the advertising material and marketing brochures sent out by drug companies to GPs in Germany has shown that about 94% of the information in them has no basis in scientific evidence."

"The study, carried out by the Institute for Evidence-Based Medicine, a private independent research institute in Cologne, evaluated 175 brochures containing information on 520 drugs, which were either sent by post or handed out to 43 GPs since last June."

The study was published in this month's issue of the drug bulletin *Arznei Telegramm* (Thomas Kaiser and Peter Sawicki, February 2004;35:21-3).

In 15% of the brochures there were no citations.

In 22%, the citations listed could not be found.

In 63% the research articles were cited but the results were not included.

"Only 6% of the brochures contained statements that were scientifically supported by identifiable literature."

"The evaluation was done by two specially trained and independently acting reviewers."

"This is the first study in Germany evaluating the quality of drug advertising material," says and other colleagues.

"The advertising material presents distorted images of the drugs' profiles."

Examples of misrepresentation examples include:

- 1) Medical guidelines from scientific societies are misquoted or changed.
- 2) The side effects of drugs are minimized.
- 3) Groups of patient are wrongly defined.
- 4) Study results are suppressed.
- 5) Treatment effects are exaggerated.
- 6) Drug risks are manipulated.

7) The effects of drugs were drawn from animal studies, not human studies.

“The authors warn that such a high amount of misinformation puts patients’ health at risk.” **[IMPORTANT]**

“Studies from other countries have shown that doctors tend to base their decisions on the information and advertising material sent out by drug companies.”
[IMPORTANT]

The authors conclude “an independent institution should be established to monitor the content of such material.”

The authors note that the German drug industry has a relationship with the medical profession in terms of cooperation in clinical studies and attendance at conferences that are funded by the drug companies.

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

- 1) Doctors base their drug prescribing decisions on the information and advertising material sent out by drug companies.
- 2) Yet, in Germany, the advertising material and marketing brochures sent out by drug companies shows that 94% of the information in them has no basis in scientific evidence.
- 3) In Germany, only 6% of the drug company brochures contained statements that were scientifically supported.
- 4) The drug company advertising material would routinely distort the drugs’ profiles. Examples of such distortions include:
 - A) Medical guidelines are misquoted or changed.
 - B) The side effects of drugs are minimized.
 - C) Groups of patient are wrongly defined.
 - D) Study results are suppressed.
 - E) Treatment effects are exaggerated.
 - F) Drug risks are manipulated.
 - G) The effects of drugs were drawn from animal studies, not human studies.
- 5) This high amount of misinformation puts patients’ health at risk.