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Study of promotional drug literature among doctors in a teaching hospital in Northern India

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ABSTRACT

Background

The aim of the study is to assess and analyse the opinion of doctors working in clinical departments regarding the drug promotional literature.

Materials & Methods

This cross-sectional observational study was done in the Government Medical College Jammu for a period of one month from March 2019 to April 2019. A total of 180 questionnaires which mentioned that whether brand/generic name, dose, dosage form, adverse drug reaction, warning/contraindication and various scientific references were present in drug promotional literature and type of promotional material preferred and its influence on the prescribing pattern were distributed among consultants, specialists, super specialists, residents and interns. After conducting the study the results were analyzed in percentage.

Results

160 questionnaires were analyzed and it was seen that 47.5% of doctors were of view that it mostly influences on their prescription and maximum were of opinion that drug promotional literature mentioned both brand/generic name, dose, dosage form, scientific references but there was minimum information about adverse drug reactions, precautions, warning and contraindication and 65% preferred pamphlets, leaflets and brochure as promotional material.

Conclusion

Certain initiatives should be taken for review of promotional and scientific material before it reaches the target i.e doctors. Clinicians should work with pharmaceutical industry to formulate evidence-based information and in absence of proper information one should be aware of risks involved in prescribing such drugs.

Keywords: Drug promotion, Prescription influences, Scientific references, WHO criteria.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world marketing of the drug plays an important role. The commonest source for providing information to physician are either verbal, written or by meeting professionally, advertising in journal, e-mail or from the medical representative. Pharmaceutical companies are spending lot of money for having effective communication to physician. So promotional drug literature are prepared and it can be defined as graphic or written material which is made available to the public for information and distribution for the purpose of promoting or marketing the particular product or brand [1]. WHO definition of Medical drug promotion is "All information and persuasive activities by manufacturers and distributors, the effect of which is to induce the prescription, supply, purchase and/or use of medicinal drugs" (WHO 1988) [2].

In clinical setting, a universally employed technique is direct to physician (DTP) marketing through the medical representative which usually visits in office or private clinics along with promotional literature [3]. These promotional materials are mostly in form of drug brochure, leaflets, pamphlets, CD's along with free medication samples and gifts such as meals or other promotional items. These drug materials ideally should show all the good and bad aspects of the drug but number of studies have shown that research findings mentioned in these drug literature is misleading or altogether inaccurate [4, 5]. This can lead to prescribing of more expensive products when cheaper drugs are available.

These promotional activities by pharmaceutical representatives largely influence the prescribing pattern of doctors and unnecessarily increasing the adverse effects and health care costs. So this study was done to assess the perspective and opinion of doctors regarding pharmaceutical promotional material and its effect on their prescription.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This observational cross-sectional study was conducted in Government Medical College, Jammu for a period of one month from 1st March 2019 to 31st March 2019. A sample size of 180 doctors which included specialists, super specialists, faculty members, residents and interns in various clinical departments of the College were interviewed using a

pre texted, structured close ended questionnaire. As such these doctors are important targets of medical representatives. The questionnaire was about evaluation of promotional product literature which is mostly delivered by representatives of pharmaceutical companies. Before starting the study oral consent was taken from the doctors and were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. All the data of questionnaires were collected and analyzed in percentages.

RESULTS

A total of 180 doctors participated in the study and 160 out of them completed the questionnaire. The results were analyzed and expressed in percentage and numbers. The respondents were the faculty members and residents of various clinical departments.

Table 1 shows that 60% (96) of doctors are of the opinion that names of active ingredients using INN (international non-proprietary)/generic name/brand name mentioned in drug promotional literature whereas according to 40% (64) only Brand name of the product is there. 100% of doctors feel that the product has the information about the dose and active ingredients per dose and 86.25 % (138) are of the view that only dosage form of product is there.

As per 80% physicians the promotional literature tells them that product has approved therapeutic uses but 33.75% and 33.72% feel that they only mention adverse drug reactions and precautions, contraindication/warnings respectively. Maximum number of doctors 75% are in of the view that they have mentioned about manufacturer's name and address in drug promotional literature as well as mechanism of action by 71.25% and scientific references by 73.2% but only 55% feel that they tell them about various drug interactions and by 79.3% the price of drug is there.

Table 1 also shows that out of 160 physicians 20.62% (33) feel that content in drug literature never influence their prescription whereas 47.5% (76) have the opinion that the information in promotional literature influences their prescription most of times. It also shows that maximum number of consultants 65% (104) preferred leaflets, brochure and pamphlets from medical representatives followed by 18.7% (30) electronic media including audio visual aids, CDs

and others like gifts with name of the drug and 16.25%(26) prefer flipcharts.

Table 1 Questionnaire of drug promotional literature

- Whether the name of product mentioned is in
 Brand name- 64(40%)
 Generic name- Nil
 Both- 96(60%)
1. Whether the product have active ingredients/contents -
 Yes- 160 (100%)
 No- Nil
 2. Whether dose is mentioned or not -
 Yes – 160(100%)
 No- Nil
 3. Whether approved therapeutic uses mentioned-
 Yes- 128((80%)
 No- 32(20%)
 4. Whether Dosage form mentioned-
 Yes-138 (86.25%)
 No- 22(13.75%)
 5. Whether have adverse drug reactions-
 Yes- 54(33.75%)
 No- 106(66.25%)
 6. Whether have precautions/contraindication and warnings-
 Yes- 53(33.72%)
 No- 107(66.87%)
 7. Whether have name and address of manufacturer-
 Yes- 120(75%)
 No- 40(25%)
 8. Whether have scientific references-
 Yes- 117(73.12%)
 No- 43(26.87%)
 9. Whether Mechanism of action mentioned-
 Yes- 114(71.25%)
 No- 46(28.75%)
 10. Whether price of drug is there-
 Yes- 127(79.3%)
 No- 33(20.6%)
 11. Whether drug interactions mentioned by them-
 Yes- 88(55%)
 No- 72(45%)
 12. Whether it influences on prescription writing-
 Always – 21(13.1%)
 Mostly- 76(47.5%)
 Rarely- 30(18.7%)
 Never-33(20.62%)
 13. Type of material preferred-

- Pamphlets }
- Brochures } 104(65%)
- Leaflets }
- Flipcharts - 26(16.25%)
- Electronic media}- 30(18.7%)
- Others }

DISCUSSION

Marketing of pharmaceutical products by the pharmaceutical companies are done by different ways like distributing brochures by medical representatives, advertisement and on line promotion of drugs. The promotion as such should be informative, reliable, truthful, accurate, scientific balanced and evidence based. But in our setup most of the doctors get the information by the medical representatives and they use to give the information as such by using drug brochures, leaflets and this information should be complete with respect to all pertaining to drug as it has huge impact on the prescribing behaviour. These representatives are of different companies and always claim that their product is better than others.

According to WHO there are some set standards for medicinal drug promotion and these ethical criteria should be followed by pharmaceutical company [2]. In our country promotional activities standards are set by self regulatory code of pharmaceutical marketing practices, organisation of pharmaceutical producers of India and by national legislation [6].

As per IFPMA (International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) Code which is a model for self regulation for pharmaceutical industrial activity in medicine promotion, communication and interaction with key stakeholders such as healthcare professionals, medical institutions and patient organisations which is not voluntary but it is a condition of membership to the IFPMA for both member companies and national associations [7].

The present study shows that 47.5% physicians claim that it influence their prescription because most of the practitioners rely on the information provided to them by these promotional literature and similar results has been seen in other studies done in Thailand And Lisbon region [8, 9]. In the present study it is observed that 66.25% feel that the drug literature lacks adverse reactions and 66.87% are of

the view that precautions/contraindication and warnings are missing and similar results are also found in other studies [10]. Prescribing a drug in complicated diseased conditions of the patient is always based on the risk–benefit analysis. No drug is free of adverse effects and information regarding possible risks of using a drug in critical condition is difficult and such information is not mentioned in promotional literature.

In our study 73% of the physicians are in opinion that these drug literatures mention scientific references but how much it is valid not known and this information can bias the judgement of the physicians. These references should be of randomised controlled trials or from case control or cohort studies [9]. So it becomes very important to critically analyse these research findings and draw some conclusions as they can mislead because wrong information is common in the literature.

But in our study the doctors are aware of these evidences and most of them considered as significant references. Drug literature has some advantages as new product is introduced by the company in the market, increases the sale and wins the good will but it can be misleading, inaccurate and can increase the overall price of the product. For providing

information of the drug certain sessions of drug literature are required for residents. Mostly it has been seen that printed advertisements do not meet regulations and guidelines and the information as such provided to the doctors by these promotional literature is incomplete [11, 12].

CONCLUSION

So this study concluded that the drug information provided to the doctors is incomplete and hence a physician should not depend only on the brochures. This may be relevant in case of residents, interns who have less experience and take the information in brochures as authentic. All material which is circulated among the prescribers should undergo assessment before it is circulated.

Pharmaceutical companies should ensure the information as per WHO set guidelines in the promotional literature. The new drug which enters in the market should have the advantage over the existing one and must be safe, efficacious, tolerable and cheap. Some methods should be created so that one can easily access the current information for the new drugs and it should be evidence based.

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