

Drugged Up

Drug advertising, by its nature, is full of pitfalls. Obviously, drug companies that advertise are pushing their medication. One problem is that many of the medications are expensive (generally, they are still under patent and not available in the generic). Another problem is that advertising, even with all the small type, can't address all the pros and cons of drugs. We've all seen or read the ads for drugs, "which may cause side effects such as nausea, headaches, drowsiness, lethargy, cancer, etc." Also, patients are now armed with the brand name of a drug and can inquire about it directly to their doctors. Drug companies spend millions on research and development, so they then spend millions on marketing to make sure the drug sells before its patent expires. But the biggest problem with this massive marketing is that not all of these drugs are safe or effective

The latest drug to be exposed is Vytorin, a cholesterol medication. According to news reports, studies have found that Vytorin is no more effective than other cholesterol-lowering drugs available in the generic. Remember, generic is usually cheaper. Schering-Plough, the makers of Vytorin, have actually had layoffs and a reorg. However, today, there was a full two-page spread in the Washington Post for Vytorin. On the one hand, I understand why they do it. On the other hand, it seems like they think that readers of the Washington Post would dismiss the findings of the study simply because of a large ad in the newspaper. The ad does not address the findings, but really, how could it? Vytorin's USP (unique selling proposition) is that it addresses two sources of cholesterol. So this ad continues to tout this two-prong approach even though it is not better than statins at lowering cholesterol.

We are a free society and a market-driven one at that. However, marketing for drugs that have potential complications or don't work as well as advertised does need to be regulated.

Public health is at stake. And I, for one, do not think the bottom line trumps health and wellbeing ever.