

The Truth  *About Health*

DRUG COMPANIES RECEIVE CRITICISM FOR ADVERTISING

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In 1996, drug makers spent almost \$600 million on ads for prescription drugs. The drug industry in general spends a total of some \$12 billion each year on advertising and promotion.

This excess advertising of prescription drugs directly to the public has fired criticism from consumer groups and medical doctors as well.

Dr. Sidney Wolfe of Public Citizen's Health Research Group in Washington noted: "I would be as adamant as anyone that a patient has to be well informed (in an ad promoting prescribed medicine). But the information has to be accurate, and accurate information is not to be confused with direct-to-consumer advertising."

Dr. Thomas Lee, an internist and cardiologist in Boston agrees. "Many of my colleagues feel that consumerism has gone too far, and is a significant danger to the doctor-patient relationship."

In 1995 the Food and Drug Administration gave drug companies the okay to take their sales pitches directly to the public. The only stipulation was that the drug ads include a "brief summary" of technical data concerning the risks, side effects, and contraindications of the drug. But, as one physician, Dr. Terry Rondberg pointed out, "...this information is often typed so small in ads it is unreadable."

SOURCE: New York Times News Service, August 5, 1997. As reported in Health Watch, Vol. 2.
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