

The Truth  *About Health*

TEN THINGS DRUG COMPANIES WON'T TELL YOU

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- 1) "We are your doctor's primary source of education." While some doctors still do their research about drugs the old-fashioned way, many get the bulk of their information from drug reps, essentially door-to-door drug peddlers who push doctors to prescribe certain medications. Drug companies spent a total of \$7 billion in 1998 selling and promoting their products to doctors.
- 2) "Hype is our favorite medicine." Following the FDA's decision to liberalize drug advertising, pharmaceutical ad budgets have risen from \$56 million in 1991 to \$1.2 billion in 1998. A Harris poll has shown that 3 out of 10 patients who take a prescription drug now request the medication that they have seen advertised.
- 3) "There's no such thing as a free sample." The drug companies rely on free samples to introduce new treatments into the mainstream. "...But what is usually being sampled is the newest product that has less known about its overall safety profile," stated Joel Lexchin, M.D. at Toronto Hospital. "The drugs have generally been tested on between 3,000 and 5,000 people. Statistically speaking, you will only recognize what will occur in one out of 1,000 people. You may have a fatal adverse drug reaction in one out of 5,000 people."
- 4) "Your doctor is our bounty hunter." Facing pressure to bring new medicines to market, drug companies are lining the pockets of doctors who provide "guinea pigs". They also help doctors get papers published and pay bonuses to those who recruit the most subjects for a given study.
- 5) "This medicine should never have been approved." According to a study conducted by the Public Citizen's Health research Group, 3 out of the 92 drugs approved for release by the FDA — two of which caused fatalities — have since been yanked. "The FDA has lowered its standards," states Larry Sasich, a pharmacist and researcher at the organization.
- 6) "You'll find out about the side-effects the hard way." Some of the moderate side-effects listed (dry mouth, constipation, blurred vision and dizziness) made Pat and Ben Christen of Weimar, TX, feel comfortable putting their 7-year-old son, Cory, on imipramine to help alleviate his ADD. Several months later, Cory was about to sip water from a fountain when his heart gave out and he died. Cardiac Arrhythmia, a known side-effect of the drug, was not listed on the information his parents received.
- 7) "We don't mind if a name is confusing, but you will." A 73-year-old woman went to her pharmacy to pick up her prescription for chlorpromazine, a psychotropic drug. Instead, she was given chlorpropamide, used by diabetics to lower blood sugar. Since Mary was already taking medicine to lower her blood sugar, the additional drug proved fatal.
- 8) "You can't trust our website." Websites that appear to be non-commercial informational resources are very often owned by the makers of the products themselves. If you connect to Arthritis Connection for unbiased information, you will get data from Searle, maker of the arthritis drug Celebrex. Sites like this abound.
- 9) "We're watching you." Drug companies buy information from pharmacies in order to determine exactly which drugs are being pre-scribed and purchased. Then, in order to stimulate

sales of a particular drug, they can target certain groups of physicians.

- 10) "We're in cahoots with your insurer." Drug companies offer substantial discounts to health care managers if they put all their appropriate patients on a particular drug. The insurer then contacts the physician, who will usually do what the HMO requests.

SOURCE: Smart Money, November 1999.