Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Medications: Implications for Patients With Cancer

Pamela Hallquist Viale, RN, MS, CS, ANP, OCN®

**Purpose/Objectives:** To review the phenomenon of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising of prescription medications in the media, with an overview of pertinent studies in the literature regarding patients’ and healthcare professionals’ perspectives on DTC advertising.

**Data Sources:** Journal articles, media, and clinical experience.

**Data Synthesis:** DTC advertising of prescription medications is extremely prevalent in U.S. society. Advertising of medications is an expensive business; yearly spending is expected to reach $7.5 billion by 2005. Although opinions vary regarding DTC advertising, healthcare professionals, including oncology nurses, must be prepared to discuss DTC-advertised medications and treatments with their patients.

**Conclusions:** Communication is the key to helping patients decipher the deluge of DTC advertisements in the media and determine the accuracy of this ever-increasing source of medical information.

**Implications for Nursing:** Oncology nurses need to be aware of the increases in DTC advertising of prescription medications and the importance of guiding patients through appropriate medication choices by education.

**Key Points...**

▸ Oncology nurses need to increase their awareness of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising of prescription medications because patients with cancer are exposed to increasing numbers of these advertisements in both broadcast and print media, as well as over the Internet.

▸ Nurses must anticipate patient-initiated dialogue regarding DTC advertised medication options, allowing patients to discuss DTC advertisements without fear of annoying healthcare providers.

▸ Although discussion of medication choices prompted by DTC advertising potentially may cause longer patient-provider encounters, this can result in a positive outcome, promoting reinforcement of lifestyle changes or symptom management strategies.

**Goal for CE Enrollees:**

To enhance nurses’ knowledge of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising for prescription medications and the implications DTC advertising has for patients with cancer.

**Objectives for CE Enrollees:**

On completion of this CE, the participant will be able to

1. Define DTC advertising.
2. Discuss benefits and risks of DTC advertising.
3. Describe nursing’s role with patients inquiring about DTC advertised medications.

---

**Pamela Hallquist Viale, RN, MS, CS, ANP, OCN®,** is an oncology nurse practitioner at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, CA. (Submitted July 2001. Accepted for publication November 12, 2001.) (Mention of specific products and opinions related to those products do not indicate or imply endorsement by the Oncology Nursing Forum or the Oncology Nursing Society.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/02.ONF.505-513

CONTINUING EDUCATION