Pharmaceutical marketing: nurses are also targeted

With their right to prescribe medical devices, their proximity to patients and doctors, and the trend towards task transfer, nurses have become prime targets in the marketing strategy of pharmaceutical companies (1).

The authors of a New Zealand survey investigated nurses’ views about the influence drug companies might have on their practice (1).

Influence underestimated. 65% of the nurses who were questioned said they had frequent or occasional contact with pharmaceutical sales representatives. 67% considered that the information provided by the drug companies probably or definitely improved their practice (1).

As in other studies involving doctors and students, half of the nurses questioned believed they were capable of recognising misleading information (2,3). However, the majority were convinced that their colleagues could be influenced by pharmaceutical companies: only 16% considered that their colleagues were also capable of detecting misleading information (1).

If doctors do it, why shouldn’t we?

Three-quarters of nurses questioned said they had received gifts from pharmaceutical companies (such as pens or notepads). More than half of nurses said they had accepted a free meal or attended a buffet sponsored by a drug company; the majority considered these practices acceptable, conditionally or unconditionally. Similarly, 70% of nurses considered that drug company funding for organising or participating in a conference was ethically acceptable (1).

Some nurses pointed out that if doctors consider these practices acceptable, they should be acceptable for nurses as well (1).

Putting one’s house in order. As the authors of the survey suggest, it is time for the nursing profession to engage in a vigorous debate over its position on pharmaceutical marketing. This is yet another reason for other health professionals, particularly doctors, who have long been subjected to drug companies’ marketing strategies, to re-evaluate their own stance on pharmaceutical company influence.

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