



Drug Promotional Practices among the Healthcare System by the Medical Representative of Pharmaceutical Companies in a Fast Developing City, Kochi

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Introduction

The drug information methods are marked as promotional, non-promotional and scientific. Promotional information includes promotional and sales content related to particular products that have been sold by pharmaceutical companies to patients or healthcare professionals via advertisement campaigns. Non-promotional materials are not related to actual goods, because they may concentrate more on the current state of knowledge of such diseases. The scientific knowledge contains the research and development (R&D) contributions. That is the pharmaceutical company's researcher who presents research results at scientific conferences and publishes the works in reviewed journals. The prescribers receive information on prescription products from a number of outlets, including summaries of clinical trials reported by corporations in government registries and medical and scientific literature. Not all marketing leads to improper use of medication. Yet there is still a conflict between the competitive pressures faced by producers to increase commodity markets, and promoting the most cost-effective alternatives available for restricted and judicious use [1].

The pharmaceutical industry was spending a lot of money on research and development. Because of the vast infrastructure, expertise, and state-of-the-art facilities for drug research and production, the monetary needs for this drug development are typically in the billions of dollars. There was no direct support from government / public funding organizations for the manufacturers. All of this puts pressure on the company to raise revenue from its own sales of goods. This is the reason provided by the pharmaceutical industry for assigning priority to research and development to the marketing division. The lack of marketing of drugs contributes to loss of revenue and lower revenues, leading to a decline in research and development funds, which eventually slows down drug discovery and growth. The pharmaceutical companies have become a remarkable source of funding for academic study, and theses sponsored study are more likely than research funded from other sources to produce favourable results for the drug being studied. The brand new businesses have additional tendencies to give more rewards and "me-too" medicines compelled more reward promotion than truly creative drugs [2].

A doctor's viewpoint on the source of information during prescribing can not necessarily suit their actions on the same information. The doctors don't find sales agents and other commercial outlets as credible sources of knowledge, but they are also the most widely used first source of information on medicines. There are several reasons known for affecting doctors who prescribe decisions and practices. Some of the circumstances are the age and gender of the physician, their training, the socio-economic characteristics of the practicing environment and the demand for health care. Certain variables such as physician level of education and experience, duration of MR visits, amount of patients treated per day and different social influences are likely to alter prescribing behaviour by physicians. Pharmaceutical firms play an important role in the promotion of their drugs through recognizing the above issues. It is important to examine

Abstract

Objectives: The study was conducted to know the radius of drugs promotional practices, to know the validity and accuracy of new drug information and the impact of drug promotion on the prescribing behaviour of doctors. The role of medical representatives in this area and to understand how our healthcare professionals are influenced by the drug companies

Methods: We developed a questionnaire to evaluate and understand how our healthcare professionals are influenced by the drug companies. The questionnaire was designed to get data about the knowledge, attitude and beliefs of the doctors, medical representatives and pharmacists regarding drug promotion. The study also focused on group discussion to get more information. We selected 20 doctors, 24 pharmacists and 24 medical representatives to get genuine factors in promotional practices.

Key findings: Almost all the doctors and pharmacists had accepted gifts and incentives. Pharmacist goes for leaflets in the drug packs and CIMS to get information and also recognise the misleading promotions done by MRs by seeing the prescription. The MRs said that the doctors were influenced by offers provided for sales promotion and mentioned that they do the sponsorship for CME programmes, lecturer and seminars.

Conclusions: The authorities should give training to our doctors and pharmacist that how to do the critical appraisal of medicinal drug promotion possibly while they are doing undergraduate. Another step is to improvement the knowledge regarding drugs available in the market through small seminars and presentations.

how such drug companies influence healthcare practitioners' prescribing behaviours in developing countries [3].

Drug advertising is an important aspect of pharmaceutical marketing and the medication is advertised and promoted in a manner that lasts for years, but as with all parts there are several issues with the marketing techniques and promotional strategies implemented by the individual drug firms. The pharmaceutical firms use various strategies to promote their products. Using MRs, distributing free samples, and ads by pamphlets, radio, television, and supporting medical events are the most popular methods for drug promotion [4]. The marketing division of the respective pharmaceutical company is broadly composed of this area. Active selling of drugs by MRs continues to be the cornerstone of drug promotion. Medical representatives play an significant role in the implementation of the company's plan by establishing partnerships with doctors in various specialties as well as with chemists to store their products in pharmacy. Medical representatives are employed by the drug companies; work on a commission basis and have to achieve the sales target given by the companies. They are a lot concerned about losing jobs even though they are unable to dictate terms.

This is the duty of the delegate to refresh the physician's awareness of the new medication released by the relevant organization using advertising materials such as brochures, calendars, pamphlets and flip charts. The truth of direct marketing success is that this would increase the relationship between doctors and MRs, resulting in increased medication prescribing and more medications per prescription. Another duty given to the MRs is to provide doctor with free drug samples. These product samples are intended to act as a reminder to the doctor to create more prescriptions with the company product. While doctors claim they are rarely affected by the involvement of MRs or by receiving the gifts from them; however, there is a noticeable difference in physician attitude and actions as they more often prescribe free drug samples out of feeling reciprocal.

India is now one of the top five globally growing pharmaceutical markets and is the front runner in a wide variety of specialties involving manufacturers, production and technology. The Indian pharmaceutical industry is a highly knowledge-based industry that is continuously rising day by day and also plays a leading role in developing the Indian economy. More pharmaceutical companies are growing their operations in India as this is a highly structured market. The pharmaceutical department has prepared a paper called 'Pharma dream 2020' to make India one of the leading landing sites for drug development and innovation. The department offers funding through the provision of world-class facilities, globally competitive scientific manpower for pharmaceutical research and development, public and private investment fund for research and many other initiatives.

Objective

- This research was conducted to find out the spectrum of drug advertising activities in a developing city (various Ernakulum district areas)
- To study about the new drug information obtained by the doctors and the pharmacist from medical representatives
- To examine the promotional practices of pharmaceutical firms
- To study the role of medical representatives on drug promotion and to understand how our healthcare professionals are influenced by these drug companies

Methodology

The study was carried out with depth interviews and focused group discussion with validation of finding across groups of doctors, medical representative and pharmacists. Strength of study was in documenting the role of medical representatives and that of the pharmacist and doctors in drug promotion and to understand how our healthcare professionals are influenced by the drug companies.

In our study, drug promotion information was difficult to obtain as because it concerns are trade secret, unethical and even illegal practices. We cast off interviewed sources who could guide us to other people who are willing to share their knowledge on which we can rely. Through our seniors and friends employed in various sectors of the same industry, medical representatives and pharmacists were approached. These groups were chosen to come up with the viewpoint on drug promotional practices: Drug manufactures establishes policies regarding marketing practices; Medical representatives can promote to increase the sale of drug and Doctors who prescribes the drugs. Chemist can promote incentive based programmes.

Study Criteria

Inclusion criteria: Only the doctors , pharmacists and medical representatives who are willing to freely take part were taken on for the study

Exclusion criteria: Ayurvedic and homeopathic doctors and pharmacists were excluded from the study. Tape recorders were not used for the study, only taken notes instead

Data collection

The study was conducted in various areas of district Ernakulum. A questionnaire developed from previous studies to guide us in assessing drug promotion on doctor prescription patterns in developed and developing countries [5]. The questionnaire was designed to collect all available data on drug information sources and to know the physicians, medical officials and pharmacists' expertise, attitudes and opinions in connection with the marketing of drugs. The questionnaire was laid out in three sections. The first part focused on the physicians, medical representatives and pharmacist demographic details. In the second section, physicians and pharmacists are asked to point out their answer to a series of statements about the sources of knowledge, prescribing or dispensing and extended to their contact with medical representatives and the opportunities provided for drug promotion. The third part focused on the perception of doctors and reliability of pharmacists on medical representatives, pharmaceutical materials as a source of drug knowledge, and how these factors will affect their prescribing behaviour which leads to better drug sales. The questionnaire provided to medical representatives was to determine their knowledge of the medical field and their product information source, as well as the benefits offered to other groups by their organization.

Study procedure

The questionnaire was distributed among 20 doctors at different hospitals, 24 medical officials and 24 Ernakulum district pharmacists. The interviews used open-ended questionnaires and also focused on community discussion to get more detail. The filling time of the questionnaire was permitted for a maximum of one week for each participant in order to enable a better answer rate. Participants who

were unable to produce the previous copy of the questionnaire were given a new copy to be filled in and backed on the spot by hand. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality of the suggested information.

Doctors asked us that what role they had in drug promotion. The physicians said about the incentives offered by the MRs and suggest us that "according to MCI rule doctors are not able to receive gifts". So the incentives and gifts columns in this project were dully filled by them. Medical representatives said that they have very much pleasure to participate in this survey and also added that all the information can't be given in the survey questionnaire, so they preferred for group discussion because by revealing all the questions asked in questionnaire will affect their job and company reputation. Pharmacists participated in the survey said that medical representatives plays a vital role in drug promotion. The pharmacists itself influenced by small gifts and special schemes offered by the representatives.

Result and Discussion

Based on the survey we discussed the subject of drug promotional practice with the health professionals and medical representatives. The interviewers were more interested in talking about methods adopted for product promotion by their competitors rather than their own.

Physicians in developed countries are the primary concern of the drug industry. With the ability to prescribe and a high reputation in society, the sales success is decided by physician's judgment about a drug. Therefore, it is not shocking that in order to boost profits, more marketing costs by pharmaceutical companies go straight to the physician.

For our study, we selected 20 doctors for the survey and discussion. Among them, 45% of doctors prescribe medicines depending on their experience, 30% depending on companies and 5% on the evidence bases. 65% of doctors pointed that the drug promotion was a medium for informing healthcare workers, but 35% of them don't think so. 85% of doctors depend upon the quality of medicines, while selecting a medicine and 80% depends on the cost of medicines and 20% on pharmaceutical companies. Among this group 90% of doctors said that receiving gifts and incentives is not a good practice but 10% said it's not that much bad practice as they are spending time for the visit of MRs.

Very limited doctors revealed that they received gifts from medical representatives and mentioned that these practice won't influence the decision on which brand to be prescribed. Many of them knew of doctors who had embraced corporations' gifts and benefits and were of the opinion that these benefits had affected their prescribing behavior. Basically all of them have a field of vision that the promotion of drugs is sure to influence pattern prescribing.

50% of doctors believe that not enough training was given to medical representatives to deal with doctors and drugs. But 45% of doctors are satisfied on the information given by MRs. Promotion have an effect on physicians attitude much more that they realize. All the time they use it as one of the source of information about new drugs and also to know about the use of medicines outside their usual therapeutical field. Most doctors also have opinion that information from pharmaceutical companies was biased, but thinks that this may

be useful about new drugs because doctors get information on their doorstep without attending any conferences or spending time on search engines to get up to date knowledge. A method in which the MRs waits for physician convenient time and place and explain information about the drugs.

90% of doctors denied that they were not influenced by medical representative throughout their practice while rest of them believed that their prescribing pattern was influenced several times by continuous visit of the MRs. The obtained details suggest that participants were more interested to say about neighbouring doctors and their colleague who are influenced by incentives but don't want to disclose their own stories, this remains a hypothesis.

65% of doctors were receiving small gifts, 50% receiving drug samples for personal and for family members, 35% receiving medical text and 20% were received medical equipments. Then 15% were received office equipments and 5% had received meals and drinks from MRs as per the survey. Medical companies are giving doctors small gifts to keep their brand in memory of patients. These "brand reminders" range from desktop items such as pens, paper weight, prescription pads and rubber stamps to minor medical devices with drug and manufacturer's name. Some of the materials can be insightful as long as they are objectively assessed but their use may encourage excessive prescribing without proper evaluation. Doctors found it hard to address the relevance of product information in advertising materials, since they were not taught accurate assessments of those information. It has also been stated that most companies strictly demand that the MRs develop a personal relationship with doctors by remembering their personal occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries etc Figure 1.

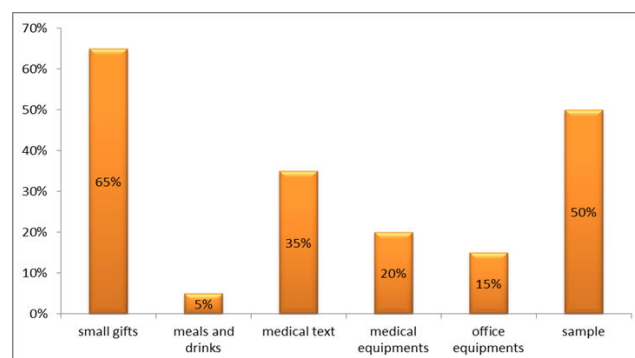


Figure 1: Percentage of gifts and incentives offered by medical representatives (MRs) to Medical Practitioners (MPs) for drug promotion

The doctors rely on several knowledge sources for the medication. Most of them suggest that they have newspaper, medical conferences, and book information. Around half of doctors try prescription details from MRs regularly. 15 % of respondents believe that drug promotion forum / product releases or labels and package inserts provide information. These forms of information on drugs are unregulated in many developed countries, and occur through the use of information sources through broad variation. Some doctors thought the MRs were a valuable source of knowledge for learning about new products because they acknowledged the information needs of medical professionals, often biased towards their own company Figure 2.

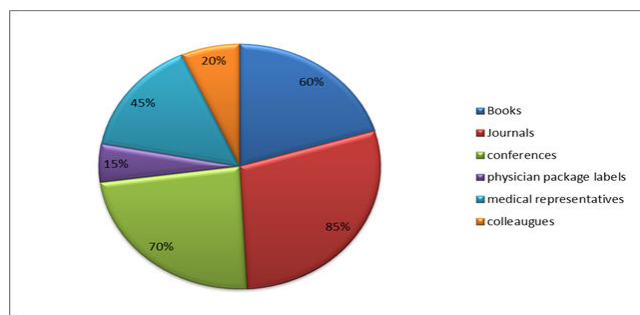


Figure 2: Sources used by medical practitioners for obtaining drug information

In Indian once a doctor graduates from medical college and setup his practice a small minority who are interested enough find time to keep themselves up to date knowledge and the latest development in therapeutics. The vast majority rely on the drug companies for information on new products either through mailing or visits by MRs. It is the unchallenged province of the sales representatives.

55% of doctors said that they allows only limited access for pharmaceutical representatives, 30% indicates substantially restricted access for pharmaceutical representatives and 10% shared the opinion like unlimited access for pharmaceutical representatives and no assess pharmaceutical representatives respectively. The physicians is not always able to comprehend marketing signals and feedback that eventually affect medical decisions by doctors and the current prescribing habits that are strongly affected by pharmaceutical industry views. Though physicians consistently deny that the advertising activities affect their perception of the drug. But there is ample evidence to support intimate experiences with a professional official in changing the attitude of the practitioner towards drugs (Figure3).

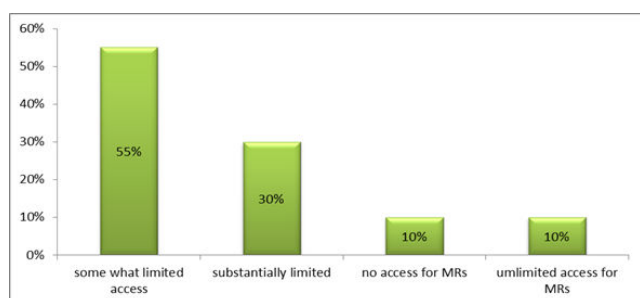


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of MRs allowed by MPs in their practice.

Doctors who were working in hospital said that, they seek drug information from pharmacist and added that they were not aware of the quality of pharmacist and most of them depend on MRs for drug information as first choice. Most medical practitioners had a thought that pharmacists are of dispensing medicines. An significant finding obtained during the survey is that knowledge about side effects is not adequate at some stage, and more signs are promoted than reported. It may tend to suggest that the doctors were unable to determine the scientific value of the knowledge given.

Pharmacists

In our study we selected 24 pharmacists from retail for collecting data about drug promotional practices. When we introduced about the study they were much interested and shared lot of information about the relation between medical practitioners and medical sales representatives [6].

According to this survey, 54.18% pharmacist have no opinion about the drug promotional practices, 25% of pharmacist indicated that drug promotional practice are good for some extend. Most of the pharmacist said that through visit of medical representative they get enough information about the new drug introduced into the markets and also about the new indications of existing drugs. 4.16% have opinion that the visit of MRs is unnecessary. Like the doctors the pharmacists also depend on the MRs for information on new drugs and new indications. As we have pharmacists union in our state, still most of them had not attended any seminars after their academic year. The PCI of Kerala has now introduced Continuous Pharmacy Education programme (CPE) in order to update the education level of all pharmacist in Kerala. Under this act all the registered pharmacist of Kerala should attend atleast two CPE in a year for the renewal of their registration every year (Figure 4).

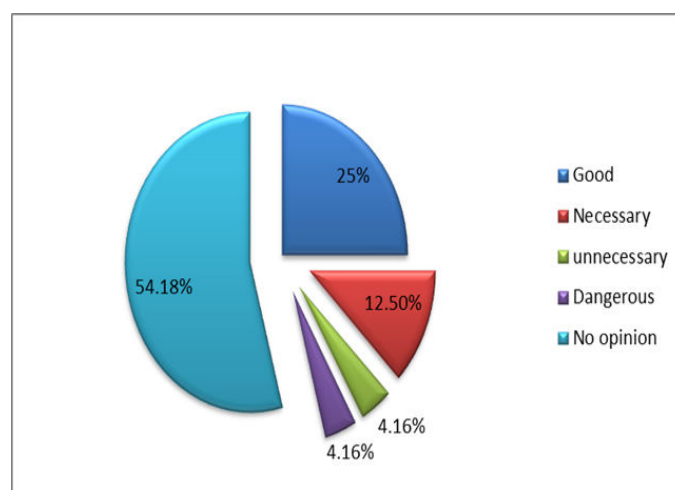


Figure 4: Opinion about drug promotion by pharmacist

By evaluating the sources of information among the pharmacist, they had relied on multiple choices. 87.5% got information from CIMS, 50% were from MRs. 12.5% and 8.30% from colleagues and medical journals. 83.30% pharmacist go for leaflets in the drug packs to get information said that most of the doctors are influenced by MRs while prescribing and only few pharmacists have no opinion about the promotional practices done by MRs and doctors, as they don't want to interfere in these matters. Most of the pharmacist can recognise the misleading advertisements and promotions done by MRs by seeing the prescription. Most of the pharmacists were silent because they don't want to break the relationship with the doctors and the pharmacy owners where they were employed. Almost all the pharmacists said that no doctors contacted them for getting drug information throughout their practice (Figure 5).

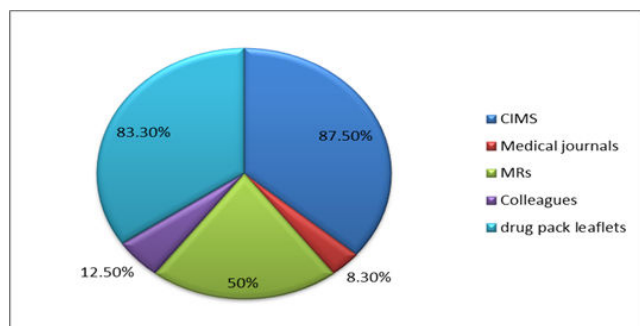


Figure 5: Drug information sources used by pharmacist.

50% of the pharmacies receives small gifts printed with the drug name on note pads, medicine packing covers, pens etc. some MRs give small house hold things like Casserole, coffee mugs, glass bowls etc to the pharmacists and owner of pharmacy. Almost all the pharmacist and pharmacy owners had received gift items like sample drugs, books, equipments like thermometer, torches, table lamps etc for the stocking of drugs in bulk. Another attractive offer given by the MRs is that if the pharmacy is ready to stock 10 or 5 boxes of drug the 1 box is free. The patients often bypass the prescribers and prefer for OTC medicines from pharmacies, which is attracted by pharmaceutical companies. By offering good marketing incentives, company encourage the sales of generic and OTC drugs to wholesalers and retailers. MRs empower physicians to prescribe medications and pharmacies for their business to store them. MRs also visit pharmacies to liquidate stocks of unsold and slow moving products. Some pharmacists have said they often change the labels when they offer a prescription. They justify poor patient being unable to afford expensive brands (Figure 6).

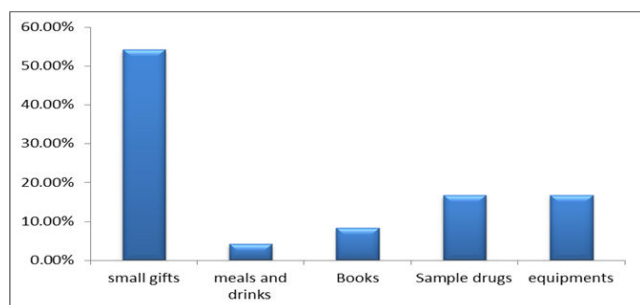


Figure 6: Gifts and incentives offered by MRs to pharmacist for drug information.

Medical representatives

By using printed product literatures, drug samples and gifts, each pharmaceutical company hires and offers training to medical representatives about how to promote and sell a drug. In India the drug industries employ nearly 40,000 members. In addition to wages, they earn opportunities to meet revenue goals, which may tip the balance in favor of selling drugs. Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) regulates promotional efforts by pharmaceutical firms

For most cases the marketing strategies are similar whether they are developed or developing countries. However, in developed countries

where health budgets are lower, some problems have some effect and resources need to extend additionally. In developed countries, for example, the lack of government support for health professionals' activities gives Drug Company the ability to organize more important meetings and seminars. Lack of funds, too, will make drug makers' deals more appealing. A product and product company's success relied mainly on the physician's prescribing activity which is the most significant target client for pharmaceutical companies.

In our study we selected 24 medical representatives from various medical companies working in Ernakulum district. Among them 66.66% were degree holders, 16.66% were MBA holders, 8.23% from B.Sc. Nursing and 4.16% from B.Pharm and biotechnology. 70.83% of MRs was selected private or small clinics for their work promotion, 62.5% visits multispecialty hospital and 33.3% visits government hospital. Most of MRs indicated that the promotion strategies of their firm are sufficient. 95.5% of MRs received formal training regarding pharmaceutical marketing and 4.16 % of them had not received any formal training in drug promotion. They stressed that there is through training for MRs and ensure that they are able to answer the queries of the doctors. One respondent also mentioned that they used post marketing surveillance to find out the success of the drug

58.33% of MRs got drug information and training about drug from product manager, 33.33% from region manager, 16.66% from marketing department and 4.16% from education department of firm (Figure 7).

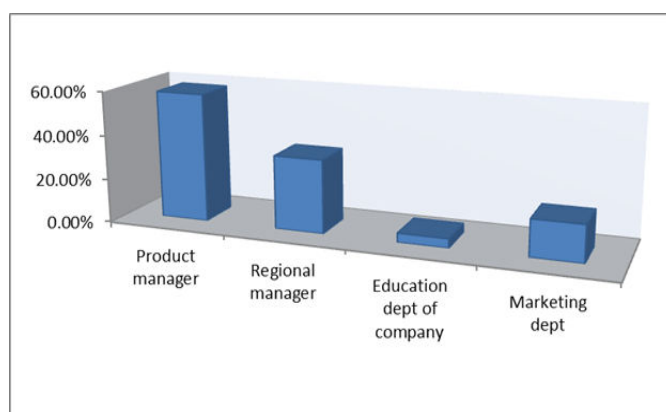


Figure 7: Drug information and training obtained by MRs about drug promotion.

Most of the MRs said that they had offered 50% small gifts to the doctors as sales promotion, 41.66% medical texts and medical sample, 16.66% office equipments, 8.33% offered gifts of money and 4.16% meals and vehicles. The MRs said that almost all the doctors were influenced by offers provided for sales promotion throughout their experience in this feild. The pharmaceutical company representatives also mentioned that they do the sponsorship for CME programmes, lecturer and seminars. These were held in hotels or other such locations the dependence of medical profession on funding for CME on the Pharma. Companies was quiet significant. The pharmaceutical companies used this opportunity by putting up stalls to displays their products and literature (Figure 8).

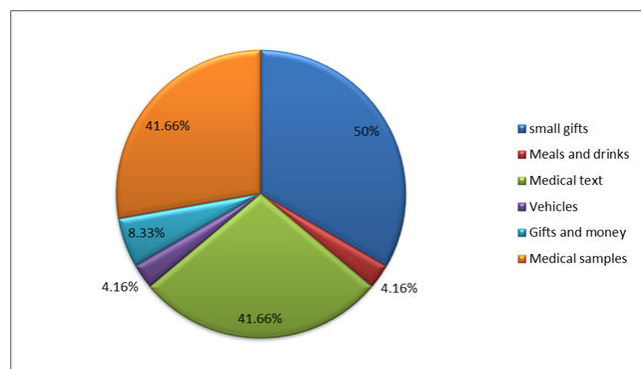


Figure 8: Various Gifts Offered By Medical Representatives to Health Professionals.

45.83% of medical representatives were usually take feedback on the sales of drug, 29.16% often take feedback and 25% never take feedback. The MRs prefer to visit the municipal hospital more because according to them, in these hospitals the authorities are not much concerned about their personal reputation and they easily succumb to MRs request in return of personal gifts and assets.

The basic details given during the marketing of drugs are use, mode of action, advantages for patients, physicians, efficient and easy use, comparison with competing products and distinction, acceptable price, reminder materials and advertising within the ethical guidelines as well as the side effect of the medication. Good bilateral relation, activity of drug, taking paramedical works, frequent visits to know the current physician prescription tendency.

MRs said the drugs stored in a pharmacy depended on the deal between chemists' association and drug manufacturer, and how well doctors were promoting the drugs. Retail pharmacists said the multiplicity of brands made it impossible for them to store branded products of all the same quality, and they risked being left with unsold stock. Therefore, they store medicines from certain companies which are well marketed by chemists and doctors alike. It made sense for both doctors and chemists to be compliant with MRs. The company also charged a fee for selling a new drug for wholesale chemists association. Drug companies were also providing more incentives for chemists to store their own products.

Conclusion

The study results indicate the institutionalization by pharmaceutical firms, doctors and pharmacists of unethical product sales strategies at

the price of the patient with a role played by MRs. More than half of the marketing expenditures by the drug industry goes directly to the advertising activities. Drug marketing relies on persuading consumers to buy more drugs, or charging high prices. Lack of medical and pharmacy awareness information stands in stark contrast to vast amounts of drug marketing targeting health professionals. The classes that obtain benefits were usually doctors and chemists. Chemists purchase and sell drugs selling by brand and making a living by the profit margin. Doctors, on the other hand, administer medications in the course of their practice and do not bill according to the product name. In their undergraduate study, our doctors and pharmacists should be given the lessons on the art of objective assessment of drug promotion, so that they may write and understand sound prescriptions. The evaluation should be mandatory for the healthcare professionals to have an attempt after a specified time in compliance with international standards. Another step is to reassign the knowledge of the drugs available on the market to all practitioners and pharmacists. This will require doctors and pharmacists to search for information in the genuine medical literature, instead of relying solely on advertising content. It was also noted that in several promotional materials, none of the promotional materials contained all the essential information recommended by the WHO Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion and the essential information about active ingredients, dosage type or protocol, and drug interactions were missing.

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