



ISSN: 0975-766X
CODEN: IJPTFI
Research Article

Available Online through
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MARKETING OF PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES TO MEDICAL RESIDENTS: THE ATTITUDE OF RESIDENTS

Zoheb Rafique¹, Saira Baloch²

¹Department of Biochemistry, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro, Pakistan

²Medical Research Center, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro, Pakistan

Email: dr_zohaib@hotmail.com

Received on 10-11-2013

Accepted on 25-11-2013

Abstract

Objective: To determine the attitude of medical residents towards interaction with pharmaceutical representatives.

Design: Survey conducted with the use of a self-report questionnaire.

Participants: 100 residents of Lumhs hospital were given questionnaire between March 2013-and May 2013; 89 completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 89%.

Results: Residents interaction with the pharmaceutical representatives was substantial.

The majority of the residents found incentives and gifts including the drug samples useful and believed that their prescribing behavior and practices were not influenced.

Conclusions: Interactions between pharmaceutical representatives and residents are common. The curriculum and training of the residents should focus on this ethical issue. Teaching hospitals should frame a clear policy regarding interactions of the residents with medical representatives.

Introduction

Pharmaceutical companies direct extensive and aggressive marketing efforts towards many professional groups including physicians, pharmacists, nurses, administrators, psychologists, trainee residents, general practitioners and, of course, consultants (1) It is reported that in United States drug companies spend a total of \$10 billion a year on promotion. They spent an estimated total of \$5000 per physician in the United States in 1988(2) and more than \$13 000 per physician in 1993 (3). This figure does not include expenses for marketing, sales personnel or overhead. According to a federal Commission of Inquiry on the Pharmaceutical Industry (4) these expenses account for 55% of promotional

expenditures; therefore, it may be estimated that approximately \$349 million out of a total expenditure of \$635 million was spent on sales representatives in 1992. Lexchin (5) recently reviewed more than 227 articles and 2000 documents on interactions between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry. He concluded that there is strong evidence that interaction with the pharmaceutical industry influences the prescribing attitudes of physicians. Company-funded continuing medical education (CME), (6) "all-expenses-paid" trips to symposia (7) and detailing (8, 9) appear to have a powerful effect on the prescribing attitude of the physicians. Lurie and associates (10) found that 32% of residents reported that they changed their prescribing habits as a result of contact and interaction with the pharmaceutical representatives.

The first interaction of the physicians and the medical representatives often happens in medical colleges. From free mugs, pens and the writing pads, household gadgets, lunches to sponsoring the educational seminars, the medical residents are offered huge incentives and perks. Critics argue that by allowing the pharmaceutical companies to offer incentives/gifts to the medical residents, it can influence resident's prescribing behavior when they become physicians and consultants [11]. Significant and substantial deficiencies were found in the medical resident's attitude and knowledge about the pharmaceutical marketing expenditures and marketing gimmicks, professional ethics in interacting with the drug companies and the accuracy of the drug information from company representatives. So medical institutes should take more steps to educate medical students and residents about the pharmaceutical marketing strategies, and how these strategies can affect prescribing behavior [12, 13].

The purpose of our current study was to assess the attitudes of the medical residents towards relationship and interaction with pharmaceutical companies and drug promotion by them.

Material & Methods

To assess the attitudes of Medical residents at Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences University and Hospital (LUMHS) towards interaction with the pharmaceutical companies and drug promotion by them, a questionnaire was designed. Our study population included First year residents to fourth year residents (89 participate) willing to voluntarily participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of total 13 questions. Completed questionnaires analysis was done using statistical methods.

Statistics: For each question, we calculated the percentage of students responding in each category. Responses to the questions were analyzed such that first response (‘Agree ’) and second response (‘Disagree’) indicates agreement with the statement while the third response (‘Neutral’) indicates unsure with the statement. The responses of the medical residents to the questions were analyzed as percentage of those surveyed who agree, neutral or disagree with the statement.

Results

One Hundred (100) residents, approximately eighty-nine (89) of those eligible – completed the questionnaire. The demographic profile of respondents is given in Table 1. And in Table 2 gives the attitude of resident’s interactions with pharmaceutical representatives.

Table: 1 Demographic Profile

Sex	Responds
Male	48
Female	41
Year of residency	
1 st year	35
2 nd year	27
3 rd year	15
4 th year	12

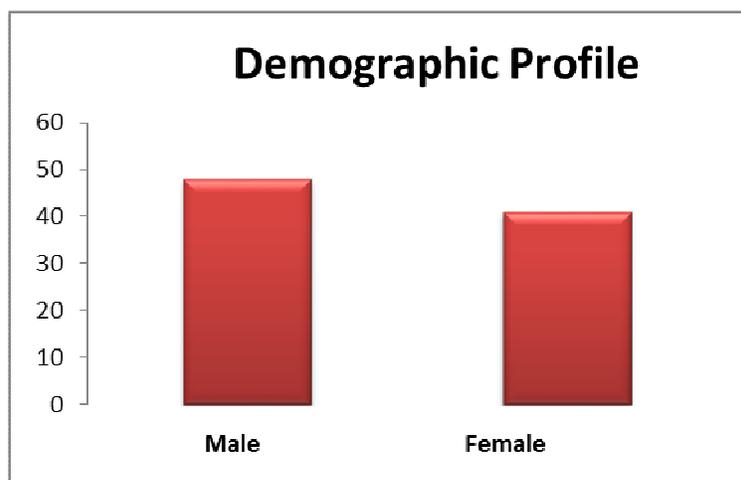


Fig: 1 shows Demographic profile male & female

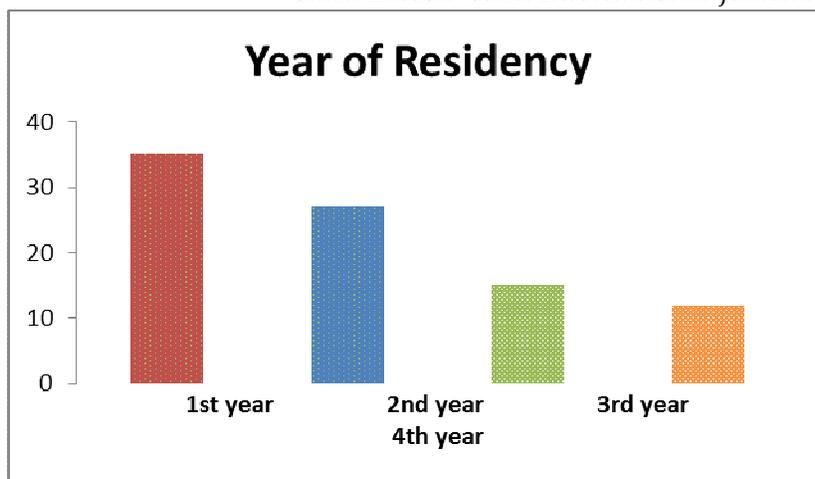


Fig: 2 shows year of residency

Table: 2 show the attitude of resident's interactions with pharmaceutical representatives.

Statement	Response
	(1) Agree (2) Neutral (3) Disagree
1. It is unethical for a resident to accept a gift of any type from a pharmaceutical company.	(1) 62 (2) 20 (3) 07
2. I would feel no harm in accepting following gifts from a drug company: pens, household gadgets, lunch, stethoscope, textbook.	54/16/19
3. The information provided by drug companies about the effectiveness of newer drugs is trustworthy.	(1) 43 (2) 39 (3) 07
4. The information provided by drug companies about the effectiveness of older drugs is trustworthy.	(1) 49 (2) 12 (3) 28
5. The residents should not have any interaction with medical representatives at their training place.	(1) 32 (2) 20 (3) 37
6. If three drugs from three different drug companies are same in terms of price, effectiveness and efficacy. I would prefer to prescribe the drug from the company which will provide me the gifts and incentives over those companies that did not.	(1) 19 (2) 07 (3) 63
7. Drug representatives should be banned from making presentations in this institute.	(1) 22 (2) 18 (3) 49
8. Interactions with drug representatives have no impact on my prescribing behavior.	(1) 52 (2) 17 (3) 20
9. It is acceptable for pharmaceutical companies to sponsor educational seminars and events	

during residential training. (1)76 (2) 07 (3)6
10. I have sufficient training about interaction with drug representatives. (1) 27 (2) 31 (3)31
11. I would always maintain the same degree of contact with drug representatives if no gifts or food were distributed.(1)75 (2) 09 (3) 05
12. Drug representatives employ marketing techniques in their interactions with residents. (1) 59 (2)2 0 (3)1 0
13. It is ethical to accept marketing gifts having patient benefit e.g. drug samples. (1) 79 (2) 03 (3) 07

Ratings from Likert Scale: Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Neutral (3) Disagree

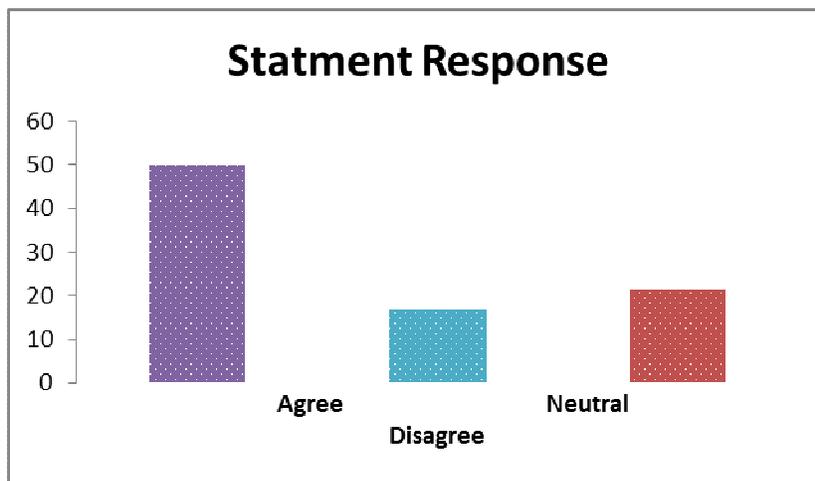


Fig: 3 shows Ratings from Likert Scale: (1) Agree (2) Neutral (3) Disagree

Discussion

The field of medicine is nowadays becoming more corporative and maximum profit is the current theme today and in this regard pharmaceutical companies are in front. Pharmaceutical companies use a major chunk of their marketing budget on doctors and physicians. They do so this in the form of various gifts. In one of the study majority of the residents found the gifts extremely useful and they believed that their prescribing behavior and practices were not influenced. They were of the view that pharmaceutical drug representatives use different marketing techniques, and there is some question mark on the reliability and validity of the information they provide but even then they should not be banned. (14). In one other study the author finds that only 24% of faculty members and 18% of resident trainees were of the view that pharmaceutical drug representatives provide very useful information on newer drugs. Forty-one percent of faculty members and 53% of trainees agreed that medical representatives should be restricted from giving

presentations on campus. **(15)**. According to one study 54.9% of residents confessed that they would attend a private dinner paid for by a drug representative; the proportion was not reduced among those residents who had read carefully the CMA guidelines, which disallow the acceptance and acknowledgement of personal gifts. 76.1% of the residents agreed that they plan to meet the pharmaceutical drug representatives in their near future practice. **(16)**. The questionnaire of our study comprises of 13 different questions and we included the residents who willingly participated in the study. We collected the data in the OPDS, wards, duty rooms and seminar rooms of the residents. We selected the participants across the hospital and we included the residents from medicine, surgery, dentistry, pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics. In the response to the question about the acceptance of different gifts like pens, household gadgets, stethoscope and textbook (60%) of the residents were of the opinion that they would feel no harm in accepting those small gifts. However (70%) of the residents felt that it is unethical for a resident to accept gift of any form from a pharmaceutical company. The residents were having different opinion when it comes to accepting gifts of patient benefits i.e. drug samples and (88%) of the residents were in favor of accepting drug samples. About (40%) of the residents were of the view that the residents should not have any interaction with the drug representatives at their training place. In response to one question only (21%) of the residents agreed that if presented with choice of drugs identical in terms of price, efficacy and effectiveness, they would prescribe the drug from the company that will provide gifts and other financial incentives. The information provided by the medial reps about the effectiveness of the newer drugs is trustworthy is believed by (48%) of the residents and (55%) of the residents showed their trust in the information provided by pharmaceutical company about the effectiveness of older drugs. In one question the residents were asked whether the drug representatives should be banned from making presentations in their institute, only (25%) of the residents agreed on it that they should be banned. In our survey the most important question was about the prescribing behavior of the residents and when asked whether the interactions with the drug representatives have any impact on their prescribing behavior, (58%) of the residents believed that interaction with medical reps have no impact on their prescribing behavior, while (19%) of the residents were unsure and only (23%) of the residents believed that their prescribing practices were influenced after the interaction with medical reps. The residents when inquired about their training regarding interactions with medical reps, only (30%) of the residents agreed that they have sufficient training about interactions with drug representatives. (66%) of the residents were of the view that the pharmaceutical

companies employ marketing techniques in their interaction with residents. One more interesting question was asked as if the residents are not offered the gifts and food, will they maintain same degree of contact with medical reps, (84%) of the residents agreed that they would maintain same contact with them. The residents when asked about the acceptance for pharmaceuticals companies to sponsor educational seminars and events during residential training, (85%) of the residents agreed on it. The results of our study showed the general attitudes of the residents at Lumhs Hospital.

CONCLUSION:

We will use this study to further strengthen our existing bioethics curriculum and especially we will emphasize on putting this ethical issue in the curriculum of residents training. The teaching hospital will also be given suggestion to make guidelines and clear policy regarding interactions of residents, consultants and physicians with the pharmaceutical company representatives. There is some hope as educating the medical residents about potential dangers and hazards of pharmaceutical companies' marketing is extremely effective in changing the behavior and attitudes of the medical residents towards receiving incentives and gifts.

For better or worse, strategies and promotions used by the pharmaceutical companies appears to affect the resident's attitudes. Perks, incentives, gifts, drug samples and industry projected the perceptions of the residents in the favor of drug industry.

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Corresponding Author:

Saira Baloch*,

Email: dr_zohaib@hotmail.com

