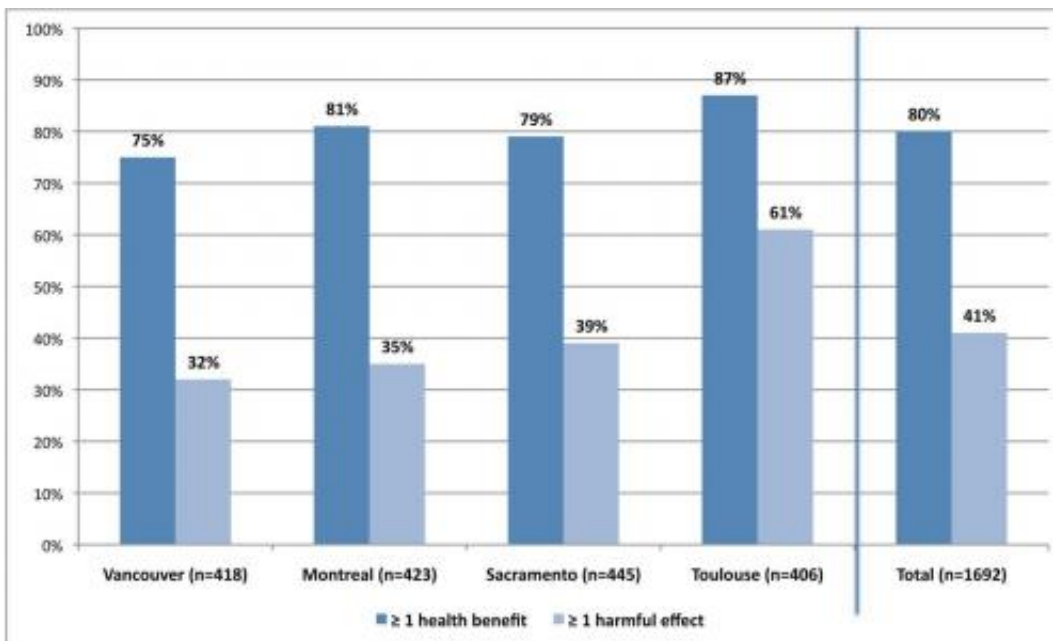


# Doctors not informed of harmful effects of medicines during sales visits

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A new UBC study compares the amount of information about a medicine's health benefits and harmful effects given to a family physician during a visit from pharmaceutical sales representatives in Canada, the U.S. and France. (Figure: UBC)

The majority of family doctors receive little or no information about harmful effects of medicines when visited by drug company representatives, according to an international study involving Canadian, U.S. and French physicians.

Yet the same doctors indicated that they were likely to start prescribing these drugs, consistent with previous research that shows prescribing behaviour is influenced by pharmaceutical promotion.

The study, which had doctors fill out questionnaires about each promoted medicine following sales visits, was published online today in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. It shows that [sales representatives](#) failed to provide any information about common or serious side effects and the type of patients who should not use the medicine in 59 per cent of the promotions. In Vancouver and Montreal, no potential harms were mentioned for 66 per cent of promoted medicines.

"Laws in all three countries require sales representatives to provide information on harm as well as benefits," says lead author Barbara Mintzes of the University of British Columbia. "But no one is monitoring these visits and there are next to no sanctions for misleading or inaccurate promotion."

Serious risks were mentioned in only six percent of the promotions, even though 57 per cent of the medications involved in these visits came with US [Food and Drug Administration](#) "black box" or Health Canada boxed warnings – the strongest drug warning that can be issued by both countries.

"We are very concerned that doctors and patients are left in the dark and patient safety may be compromised," says Mintzes, an expert on [drug advertising](#) in UBC's School of Population and Public Health.

Doctors in Toulouse were more likely to be told of a harmful effect in a promotional visit, compared to doctors in Canada and the U.S., according to the study. Researchers suggested that this may reflect stricter [regulatory standards](#) for promotion of medicines in France.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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