

An updated analysis of direct-to-consumer television advertisements for prescription drugs

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Although proponents suggest that direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising is educational and motivating, a new analysis finds that the

potential educational value of such advertising has declined.

Compared to an analysis of direct-to-consumer television advertising published in 2007, this study found a significant decrease in the percentage of ads conveying information about the conditions being targeted, such as [risk factors](#) (decreased from 26 percent to 16 percent) and prevalence (decreased from 25 percent to 16 percent).

Positive emotional appeals continued to be emphasized (94 percent of ads), with a decrease in the use of negative emotional appeals (from 75 percent to 51 percent), resulting in a more positive portrayal of the medication experience.

Lifestyles portrayed in the ads emphasized how products can enable more recreational activities (69 percent of ads), while fewer ads suggested [lifestyle change](#) in addition to the product (decreased from 23 percent to seven percent).

The authors suggest that portraying positive aspects of the post-medication experience, such as [recreational activities](#), endurance, and social approval, may have motivational value, but may also imply off-label outcomes and encourage an inappropriately broad population to seek the advertised drug.

According to the authors, improving the educational value of direct-to-consumer [advertising](#) is likely to require further regulatory action by the FDA, rather than reliance on self-regulation by the pharmaceutical industry.

More information: Janelle Applequist et al. An Updated Analysis of Direct-to-Consumer Television Advertisements for Prescription Drugs, *The Annals of Family Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1370/afm.2220](https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2220)

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