Prescription Drug Advertising

From Approval to Your Screen

Direct to consumer advertising is when drug companies push messaging directly to your TV, social media, or other form of advertising. This is widely used in pharmaceutical advertising, including drug commercials, but ultimately a prescription is needed from a health care professional to get the drug.

Ad Requirement

Depending on the type of ad, information must include:

- Accurate risks and benefits.
- Must not be misleading or false.
- FDA approved use of drug.
- Most significant risks from taking drug.
- Print ads must direct consumers where to report negative side effects.

Authority

"Except in unusual instances, we cannot require drug companies to submit ads for approval before they are used. Drug companies must only submit their ads to us when they first appear in public. This means that the public may see ads that violate the law before we can stop the ad from appearing or seek corrections to the ad."

– FDA, 2015

Problem

- US and New Zealand are the only two countries that allow drug manufacturers to market prescription drugs directly to the public.
- The FDA does not review prescription drug advertisements prior to airing, leaving accuracy and compliance in the hands of the drug manufacturer.
- Loopholes exist allowing drugs that may have incomplete safety profiles to be aired to your television.
- One study found that among cancer drugs the average time from accelerated approval to indicating the drug needed to be withdrawn was 46 months.