Sexual health information for young people/View from primary care

**“Nine out of ten patients survived”**

C Nicholl

So it’s finally happened: the NHS is being allowed to enter the world of fluff, glamour and backstabbing, or advertising as it’s known by most. This licence to kill off the competition, literally, may well be shrouded in regulatory codes to give it authenticity but this of course is advertising in its best form – dressing up something evil and destructive to make it look real and above board.

If I sound suspicious of this idea then it’s because maybe I am. The pharmaceutical industry lavished GPs with expensive gifts, trips, food and drinks for years. But they stamped that out, didn’t they? Oh, how those educational meetings at five-star hotels in foreign cities, supping Bollinger with the reps are missed. I don’t know who felt it the most. Those who had come to rely on conferences providing family holidays or those heading for general practice who saw the freebie rug pulled out from under them before they’d had the chance to enjoy the benefits of the combination TV and video used to screen a company’s latest educational advert and conveniently forgotten by the drug rep afterwards.

But now once again the NHS is to re-invent the wheel, as it always does. Very soon it would appear that NHS providers would be able to promote their services, and indeed compare themselves with other providers. What fun GPs are going to have with the new ‘Trust reps’ who will take the place of ‘drug reps’. In bygone days, to save time I know some GPs would schedule two competing pharmaceutical reps in to see them at the same time, and then watch them play ‘pharma tennis’ as one tried to destroy cold calls and text messages informing us how we’ve made it into the last ten for a dream operation of our choice, that the thousandth caller will win a state-of-the-art air-conditioned therapy suite where coils, implants and ‘depos’ can be provided faster and quicker than ever before, or that if we order now we’ll receive a free plasma screen so patients can watch their procedure in high definition that ‘puts you where the action is’. Hell knows what will happen if they are invited to ‘press the red button’. A link to some medical negligence claim company no doubt.

At the moment the focus is on hospital Trusts promoting their services but primary care is included in this little wheeze. I guess it won’t be long before we see a fleet of new Minis with smart paint jobs advertising their driver’s practice. Mine would probably be along the lines of: “At the Open Heart Surgery you’ll be welcomed by open minds and arms”. Cheesy I know, but what adverts aren’t?

TV adverts will soon follow. Bearing in mind the current litigation climate it would be wise to place them after those aforementioned and irritating medical negligence claim adverts. This way the public can be told: “There’s never been a successful claim against our practice so if you want great health care come and join us, but if you’re after a fast buck we’ll refer you for a colonoscopy’.

I’ve already seen potential practice adverts for our local newspapers. Not that I’m interested of course, but it’s important to know what our competition may be doing. One such mock-up informed its readers that: “Our practice has more fit and healthy patients than any other practice around”. Then with a group photo of the practice team, who looked somewhat high, the advert announced: “How do we achieve this? Well, because we care, and take great care of our patients who are like family to us – and after all, you’re worth it”. I enjoyed the ad, as I don’t like to see my family too often either. Of course, the subliminal message of this advert would encourage the fit and well to join the practice’s list whilst ensuring that those with the slightest blemish of imperfection felt they couldn’t. I had to concede that the strategy was clever, and had a certain appeal.

But I can feel myself being sucked in. I’m still really suspicious of this idea or am I? All this gone before may simply be the bluff of great advertising!

©FFPRHC J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care 2007: 33(2)
"Nine out of ten patients survived"

C Nicholl

*J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 2007 33: 105
doi: 10.1783/147118907780254169

Updated information and services can be found at:
[http://jfprhc.bmj.com/content/33/2/105.citation](http://jfprhc.bmj.com/content/33/2/105.citation)

**Email alerting service**

Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

**Notes**

To request permissions go to:
[http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions](http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions)

To order reprints go to:
[http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform](http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform)

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
[http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/](http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/)