

[IMAGE]

## Big Spenders

We've all seen the recent increase in television commercials for various drugs. In 1997, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reduced its restrictions for mass media advertising of prescription drugs, allowing pharmaceutical companies to air TV commercials without including details on the side effects of these drugs. Drug companies have been spending much more on advertising as a result.

Using data on advertising costs and prescription drug sales from 1999-2000, the authors of this study investigated whether drug sales are being disproportionately influenced by increased advertising, through a sampling of approximately 40,000 retail outlets.

Merely 1% of all prescription drugs in the U.S. accounted for half of the money spent on drug advertising. In other words, nearly 50% of the money spent on the total of almost 10,000 available prescription drugs was spent on the 50 most-advertised drugs. The sale of these drugs jumped approximately one-third, while sales of all other drugs combined increased only 14%.

In 2000, the arthritis drug Vioxx topped the list for advertising costs, at \$160 million - 7% of the total \$2.3 billion per-year drug-market spending. Prilosec (for stomach ulcers) and Claritin (for allergies) followed Vioxx in advertising costs. Of concern is that doctors and their patients are seeking particular drugs because they are well known; not necessarily because they are the best or safest treatments for a condition.

### *Reference:*

Findlay S, Sherman D, Chockley N, et al. Prescription drugs and mass media advertising, 2000. National Institute for Health Care Management Research and Education Foundation, November 2001. Online at <http://www.nihcm.org>.

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