

[IMAGE]

## Unbalanced Reporting

Patients often name the media, along with doctors and pharmacists, as a primary source of information about new prescription medications. One of the primary goals of news media is to protect the public good by providing fair, balanced and accurate information. Minimally, news reports on new drugs should list both the harms and benefits, along with their role in treating a condition.

In Canada, where more money is collectively spent on prescription drugs than doctor visits, a study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* evaluated newspaper articles in 2000 reporting on new drug benefits and risks, and other aspects related to fair and balanced reporting. Researchers looked at news coverage of five prescription drugs launched between 1996 and 2001 that were prominently named in the media (Lipitor, Celebrex, Tamiflu, Aricept and Evista). Articles that named at least one benefit or harm for any of these medications in any of Canada's 24 largest daily newspapers were considered.

Almost 200 newspaper articles reported at least one benefit or harm of one of these five drugs in 2000. Every article mentioned a minimum of one benefit, but over two-thirds did not mention any possible side-effects or risks from taking these drugs. In fact, drug benefits were five times more likely to be mentioned in articles than harmful side-effects. And merely 4% of the articles mentioned contraindications to drugs, or significant reasons not to take them - information needed before safely deciding to take a medication.

This study highlights the concern that media reports on new drugs may be incomplete and present an unbalanced view of medications, making people decide they need a particular drug for their condition based on minimal information. Although this study was conducted in Canada, for comparison, a similar study conducted in the U.S. showed that over half of media reports mentioning drug benefits listed no potential harmful side-effects.

Don't formulate opinions about the value of a new medication based on the media - only your physician is qualified to determine which prescription drugs are safe and effective. Your chiropractor is also an important source of information, particularly when it comes to proposing nonpharmaceutical options for dealing with your condition.

*Reference:*

Cassels A, Hughes MA, et al. Drugs in the news: An analysis of Canadian newspaper coverage of new prescription drugs. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2003;168(9), pp. 1133-1137.

To read about the many risks associated with prescription and over-the-counter drugs, go to [www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/general/drugs](http://www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/general/drugs).

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