



## Student Manual: *Understanding and responding to pharmaceutical promotion*

### Overview

Medicines are a vital part of improving and maintaining people's health, and healthcare professionals such as doctors and pharmacists, play a key role in ensuring that medicines are prescribed and used rationally. However, concern remains about the relationship between healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical industry; particularly the industry's influence on prescribing and dispensing decision-making. This influence can lead to less than optimal treatment choices to the detriment of public health.

### Rationale

Many publications have reported that promotion influences how medicines are prescribed and used. For example, reviews of almost 3000 articles in the World Health Organization/Health Action International promotion database confirm that promotion does influence how doctors prescribe; that health professionals underestimate the power of this influence; that promotional material is often relied upon as information; and that industry-sponsored promotional activities tend to show a company's medicine in a positive light. The research also shows that the influence of promotional material starts early in medical and pharmacy students' training.

For this reason, in 2004-2005, educators around the world took part in an international, cross-sectional survey conducted by WHO and HAI aimed at mapping educational initiatives underway to teach medical and pharmacy students about pharmaceutical promotion.

The responses showed that despite the responsibility entrusted to doctors and pharmacists to prescribe and dispense medical treatment, health professionals receive little or no instruction on how to assess pharmaceutical promotion and how to understand its often subtle influence on their behaviour.

As a result of the survey, WHO and HAI created a new tool to educate students before they start prescribing and dispensing medicines. The draft manual is entitled ***Understanding and responding to pharmaceutical promotion: A practical guide.***

### Project goal

The manual aims to provide practical training for students on how to recognise various promotional techniques and how to access quality, independent information about medicines.

### Project description

The draft manual is modelled on, and should be seen as, a companion module to the WHO's earlier publication *Guide to good prescribing*. Produced as part of a collaborative project, the manual represents a first step in preparing medical and pharmacy professionals for dealing with the effects of marketing on their decision-making.

## Content of the Manual



The manual is comprised of nine chapters, covering a variety of techniques used in pharmaceutical promotion.

1. **Promotion of medicines and patient health**  
*Barbara Mintzes*
2. **Techniques that influence the use of medicines**  
*Peter R Mansfield*
3. **Analysing pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals**  
*Joel Lexchin*
4. **Pharmaceutical sales representatives**  
*Andy Gray, Jerome Hoffman and Peter R Mansfield*
5. **Promotion to consumers: Responding to patient requests for advertised medicines**  
*Barbara Mintzes, Les Toop and Dee Mangin*
6. **Learning how not to do the pharmaceutical industry tango: Raising student awareness of ethical conflicts of interest**  
*Arthur Schafer and Nancy Olivieri*
7. **Regulation of pharmaceutical promotion: Why does regulation matter?**  
*Lilia Ziganshina and Joel Lexchin*
8. **Using unbiased prescribing information**  
*Andy Gray, Bob Goodman, José M. Téran and Barbara Mintzes*
9. **Promotion, professional practice and patient trust**  
*Dee Mangin*

## Approach

The draft manual will be published and distributed to medical and pharmacy schools that expressed interest in teaching it, along with feedback forms concerning each chapter and the whole manual. This will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the manual's content and the resources provided.

## Next steps

Following the roll-out, the manual will be revised based on feedback and evaluation data. It will also be pilot tested and evaluated at a number of sites using English and Spanish versions of the text. The testing will evaluate the effect on students' knowledge, attitudes and skills in understanding and responding to pharmaceutical promotion.

A teachers' guide is also being finalised to help educators present the manual's material in an engaging and culturally relevant way.

*HAI is currently distributing copies of the draft manual to educators interested in reviewing it and using it with students. Those wishing to receive a copy of the draft manual in English, Spanish or Russian can contact Project Officer, Carole Piriou: [carole@haiweb.org](mailto:carole@haiweb.org)*