Author's response to reviews

Title: A cross-sectional evidence-based review of pharmaceutical promotional marketing brochures and their underlying studies: Is what they tell us important and true?

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Revisions to Version 2

Title A cross-sectional evidence-based review of pharmaceutical promotional marketing brochures and their underlying studies: Is what they tell us important and true?

Reviewer: Joel Lexchin

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Page 4, 1st paragraph:
The authors should make it clear that the $11 billion figure excludes the value of samples left behind in physicians' offices.

This was corrected

Page 4, 2nd paragraph:
In discussing the changing rate of prescribing of CCBs, diuretics and beta blockers the authors language makes it sound as if there is a cause and effect relationship between the volume of promotion and the volume of prescribing. What has been demonstrated is an association not a cause and effect.

This was reworded to ensure a causal effect was not assumed

Page 6, 2nd paragraph:
It should be "convenience" not "convenient".

Corrected

Page 7, 1st paragraph:
The sentence "In addition, the reviewers also assessed how these data were graphically presented on the brochures" is vague. The authors should provide a more detailed description of how this assessment was made.

A more detailed description was provided

Page 9, last paragraph:
The statement about what Cooper et al showed is not completely accurate. What Cooper said is that 58% of the original research cited in ads was either sponsored by the drug company or had a company affiliated author.

This was corrected

Reviewer: Howard Brody

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I would still have liked to see some acknowledgement of an obvious criticism-- the old "the light is better here" joke about research. The skeptic will say: the real impact of drug marketing on the physician is the result of the total interaction with the detail person. The brochure is basically just one prop in this encounter. The authors were, quite naturally, not equipped to study this total package of interventions, as the research methods would
be extremely burdensome if not impossible. They therefore selected out the printed brochure, not because it was really so important in itself, but simply because that is convenient to study in isolation. In keeping with this, I was surprised in the directions for future research NOT to see some mention of the obvious (to me) next step, which is to find a way to restore the link between the printed brochure and the total marketing encounter, and to study further the role that the brochure plays within that encounter and the impact it has on the practitioner.

The reviewer makes a valid point. We included these suggestions in the “limitations” and “conclusions” of the manuscript.