Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 3 Date: 23 January 2006

Reviewer: Howard Brody

Reviewer’s report:

General

The authors have responded fully and thoughtfully to the criticisms of the earlier draft. They continue to make a strong case that this is a novel study, looking at a segment of drug marketing to physicians that has not been previously explored in this way. They have clarified some outstanding questions about their methods satisfactorily.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached) NONE

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) NONE

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.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests