

Book review

Sidestep the pharma tango

Understanding and responding to pharmaceutical promotion.

Mintzes B, Mangin D, Hayes L (editors). Amsterdam: Health Action International Global and World Health Organization, 2010 (online, free).

THIS BOOK is a collaborative project by Health Action International Global — an organisation based in Amsterdam and committed to promoting the rational use of medicines — and to increasing access to essential medicines, and the World Health Organization.

The editors (Barbara Mintzes, Assistant Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology, Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of British Columbia, Canada; Dee Mangin, Director of the Primary Care Research Unit at the University of Otago in New Zealand; and freelance scientific editor Lisa Waller-Hayes) all have a background in writing about pharmaceutical promotion.

Information on the influence of promotion on medicine use is often lacking. This book is an attempt to remedy this by bringing together studies on various aspects of promotion, including medical journal advertisements, sales representatives, conference sponsorship, physician opinion leaders and direct consumer advertising. There are contributions from many countries including Australia, a world leader in promoting the rational use of medicines.

Health professionals are the target of aggressive and sustained promotional pressure by the pharmaceutical

industry but are often not sufficiently educated about understanding and responding to such promotion. This book is intended to fill this gap, and it does so admirably. It also teaches readers the importance of using unbiased sources of information. It has been designed as part of a student module on pharmaceutical promotion, but the easy-to-read style incorporating pictures, graphs and well designed boxes and logical organisation ensures that it can be read on its own.

I am currently using it to conduct small-group activity-based teaching sessions for second-year students and consider it superior to other initiatives I have used.

I especially liked the chapters dealing with pharmaceutical sales representatives and how to avoid the “pharmaceutical industry tango”. The references at the end of each chapter are comprehensive, and numerous web links are provided. However, it lacks an index.

The book can be freely downloaded from the Health Action International website (www.haiweb.org) and is sure to be of interest to all health professionals.

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