



## ACNP POSITION PAPER Nurse Practitioners and Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTCA)

The American College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring a solid policy and regulatory foundation that enables nurse practitioners to continue providing accessible, high quality health care. With a membership of national and state nurse practitioner organizations representing over 30,000 members in all fifty states, the ACNP is a national leader in public policy issues for nurse practitioners with eminent influence on health care policy.

Nurse Practitioners are vital and indispensable to quality health care. Research supports that health care outcomes improve when care is provided by nurse practitioners. As an organization representing nurse practitioners, the ACNP is committed to educating the American public about the role of the nurse practitioner. In so doing, the ACNP believes that it can affect improved health care for millions of Americans and increased access to quality health care for patients and families.

As a leader and preferred partner in expanding, disseminating and translating knowledge about nurse practitioner and health care issues it is the position of ACNP and the more than 120,000 nurse practitioners in the United States (HRSA 2005) that patients and families must be given correct consumer information regarding health care and nurse practitioners.

An increasingly prominent source of consumer information is contained in pharmaceutical advertising of prescription drugs and immunizing agents. Television, internet and radio advertising, or Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTCA), of pharmaceutical agents is becoming a more and more popular venue for the pharmaceutical industry to provide information about its products. DTCA increases consumer awareness about drugs and treatment options; motivates patients to seek health care; and, encourages patient compliance with medication regimens, (PhRMA, 2005; Aiken, 2003). The ACNP acknowledges the benefits of DTCA, and supports the 2005 PhRMA *“Guiding Principles Direct to Consumer Advertisements about Prescription Medications”*. Specifically, it is the position of the ACNP that:

- DTCA is a useful vehicle for educating consumers about health care prevention and treatment options. Information provided in DTC advertising must be supported by substantial evidence.
- DTCA must include detailed and accurate information regarding the pharmaceutical agent being advertised including the condition for which the medication can be prescribed and the risks and benefits of taking the medication.
- DTCA must promote communication between health care consumers and health care professionals in order for patients to be fully informed regarding the

medication and the rationale for choosing one particular medication over another for any particular patient.

- Pharmaceutical companies should allow a reasonable period of time to elapse between the release of a new prescription medication and DTCA in order to allow health care professionals the opportunity to become familiar with the medication.
- DTCA advertising should provide information regarding cost and availability of the medication to all consumers.

Additionally, it is essential that DTCA direct consumers to all health care professionals who diagnose, treat and prescribe medications. In its 1999 document, *“Guidance to the Industry—Consumer Directed Broadcast Advertisements”* the United States Food and Drug Administration reminded “sponsors of prescription drug advertisements to be careful not to imply that only physicians can prescribe their products.” In the April, 2004 addendum to that document, the FDA again urged the pharmaceutical industry to disclose that “physicians and other healthcare providers” can provide additional information about advertised products. The common practice of advising consumers to “consult your physician” is misleading and detrimental to the health care of Americans. Nurse Practitioners as well as other health care providers prescribe medication. An instruction to consumers that provides them with only one option for sources of additional information on prescription medications is misleading, limits consumer access to vital information and has the potential to limit access to care.

Increasing the health knowledge base of patients and families (consumers) is a vitally important function of nurse practitioner philosophy. It is only through the correct dissemination of information that consumers can make decisions, which affect their lives and the lives of their families. To this end, the American College of Nurse Practitioners calls on all pharmaceutical companies, and the advertising firms which they employ, to direct consumers in their product advertising to all licensed health care prescribers or qualified health care professionals.

By working together with the pharmaceutical industry to assure full and correct information to consumers, the American College of Nurse Practitioners believes that the health care status of the American public can be enhanced and improved.

Sources:

Aiken, K. (2003). Direct to Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Physician Survey Preliminary Results. FDA/Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. Rockville, MD.

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