Significant improvement in quality and usefulness could be obtained by increased population coverage or by adequate sampling methods, by more accurate recording of height and weight and by more accurate data entry. Practitioners need clear guidance on the requirements and purpose of data collection. Feedback of aggregated data to clinical staff would highlight issues of data quality and identify how these might be improved. Associated with these changes, there needs to be a readiness on behalf of those who ‘own’ the data to share these with investigators after, of course, the confidentiality and security of the data have been adequately assured.

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Misleading promotion of drugs in Bangladesh: evidence from drug promotional brochures distributed to general practitioners by the pharmaceutical companies

Sirs,

Pharmaceutical industries worldwide are heavily involved in aggressive drug promotions.1 But, the promotional claims for drugs are often inaccurate and not based on proper scientific evidences, contributing to irrational drug use through inappropriate prescribing.2 Drug promotion and marketing make up a very large part of the activities of pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh, and drug companies are the only organizations here to provide drug information to the health care providers. It is generally believed that over-statements and misinformation are common promotional activities of drug companies in Bangladesh.3 Till date, no information is available on the nature and extent of promotional activities of the drug manufacturers in Bangladesh.

We undertook an exploratory study to determine the characteristics and prevalence of misleading claims in the pharmaceutical promotional brochures disseminated among general practitioners (GPs) in Bangladesh. The study was based on critical evaluation of drug promotional brochures obtained from the offices of conveniently selected top 10 GPs in a district town during 5–30 November 2006. A total of 341 promotional claims were obtained and studied from 115 different drug promotional brochures. Promotional claims not substantiated by appropriate scientific evidences were considered as misleading claims. The misleading claims were further categorized as debatable, overstated, ambiguous and forged to specify.

Our study showed that prevalence of misleading claims in the promotional brochures was quite high (n = 116, 34.02%) in Bangladesh. Of the total misleading claims, 50% were based on debatable evidences, which were not supported by substantial scientific supports. Overstated claims accounted for around 21.55% of the entire unjustifiable promotional claims. In addition, rates of ambiguous and forged claims were reported as 16.38 and 12.07%, respectively.

Misleading promotion has become a community concern at present as this can undermine the public’s trust in health professionals and may encourage inappropriate prescribing. Ironically, misleading drug promotion has appeared to be a vicious circle between the drug companies and health professionals that does more harm than good worldwide.4 Various studies reported variable rates of misleading claims in the printed promotional materials. In an analytical study, 18% misleading claims were found in Pakistan.5 Another study from Germany showed 94% unsubstantiated...
information in the advertising material and marketing bro-
chures sent out by drug companies to GPs.6 A previous study
in an Asian country showed 21% controversial, 32% exag-
gerated and 26% false claims of the total misleading claims ident-
ified.5 Again, a US-based study found 15% exaggerated
claims in the brochures distributed to the family doctors by
drug companies.7 Similarly, our study also reported significant
rate of misleading claims of different types.

Owing to non-probabilistic sample selection, the study
results cannot be generalized, but it may give important
information about the rate and patterns of misleading drug
promotion in Bangladesh. The occurrence of high level of
misleading claims in the pharmaceutical, promotional bro-
chures may adversely affect prescribing behaviour of the
health professionals in the country. Further, large-scale
studies are required to gauge actual prevalence of misleading
drug promotion and its broad impact on public health.

Conflict of interest statement
None declared.

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