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SURVEY: NEARLY ONE IN THREE ADULTS HAS TALKED TO A DOCTOR AND ONE IN EIGHT HAS RECEIVED A PRESCRIPTION IN RESPONSE TO A DRUG AD

***Many Say Prescription Drug Ads Do a Good Job,
But Most FDA-Required Information Doesn't Register***

WASHINGTON, DC – Ads featuring prescription medications for everything from heartburn and asthma to birth control and impotence have appeared in growing numbers on prime-time television since new Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules cleared the way in 1997. Last year alone, the pharmaceutical industry spent \$2.5 billion on all forms of “direct-to-consumer”(DTC) ads. A new survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation examines how consumers respond to such ads: what information they retain, what actions they take, and their views about this type of marketing.

Released today at a briefing with consumer, pharmaceutical industry, and medical representatives, the nationally representative survey gauges the public’s response to drug ads in general, as well as to ads for three specific medications shown to some respondents prior to the survey -- Lipitor (to lower cholesterol), Nexium (for heartburn or acid reflux), and Singulair (for asthma). Key findings include:

- Nearly a third (30%) of adults have talked their doctor about a drug they saw advertised, and 44% of those who talked to their doctor received a prescription for the medication they inquired about. This means that one in eight Americans (13%) has received a specific prescription in response to seeing a drug ad.
- After viewing specific prescription drug ads, about four in ten said they were very or somewhat likely to talk to their doctor about the drug they saw advertised (37%) and/or to talk to their doctor about the health condition mentioned in the ad (40%).
- When asked for a self-assessment of how much they learned from viewing a specific ad, most (70%) said they had learned little or nothing more about the health condition, and a majority (59%) said they knew little or nothing more about the drug. However, when asked questions about medical information featured in ads for the drugs Lipitor, Nexium, and Singulair, people who just viewed a particular ad are in some cases much more likely than non-viewers to give correct answers.
- The FDA requires DTC ads to include information about possible side effects and where consumers can go to learn more about the drug. While people who had just viewed an ad were not always able to remember the specific side effects it mentioned, they were more likely than people asked about ads in general to view the side effects as serious. Forty-nine percent of people who had just seen an ad did recall that it mentioned getting more information from a doctor or pharmacist, but 40% were not able to recall where else to go for more information.

- Many adults say that ads they have just seen did a “good” or “excellent” job of telling them about the condition the advertised medicine is designed to treat (84%), the medicine’s potential benefits (72%), and who should take it (66%). Fewer, but still about half, said the same about potential side effects (52%) and directions for using the medicine (47%).

More than four years after the FDA issued new rules governing broadcast DTC ads – which allow television and radio ads to promote specific drugs with less detailed information in the ad itself about side effects and precautions than is required of print ads – the marketing of prescription medications directly to consumers remains the focus of considerable debate. Proponents argue that DTC ads inform consumers about important, treatable health conditions and encourage doctor-patient communication, while critics say the ads contribute to rising drug costs and lead people to demand unnecessary or inappropriate medications.

“Drug ads may drive up health care costs and drug company profits, but the drugs people get may also make them healthier,” said Drew Altman, Ph.D, president of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The Kaiser Family Foundation also released today *Prescription Drug Trends—A Chartbook Update*, a comprehensive resource with data on prescription drug coverage, spending, utilization, drug promotion, and the pharmaceutical industry. Key data include:

- Prescription Drug Expenditures: National spending for prescription drugs, projected to be \$116.9 billion in 2000, has almost tripled since 1990. Although prescription drugs represent only 10% of personal health care spending, they are the fastest growing segment of health care spending, accounting for 20% of the estimated increase in such spending between 1999 and 2000.
- Factors Driving Growth in Prescription Drug Expenditures: Increased numbers of prescriptions and shifts in use from older to newer, more expensive drugs continue to account for most of the growth in drug spending. But in recent years, manufacturer price increases have contributed a growing proportion of the total rise in prescription drug spending (19% from 1993-1997, and 24% from 1997-2000).
- Utilization: Prescription drug use continues to grow steadily. The number of prescriptions has grown at an average annual rate of 6% since 1992, reaching almost 3 billion prescriptions in 2000.
- Types of Drugs Used: Newer, more expensive brand-name drugs continue to replace older, less costly drugs. All of the top 20 drugs ranked by dollar sales in 2000 were brand-name drugs, and these 20 drugs represented 29% of total sales for the year.
- Trends in DTC Ad Spending: DTC promotion spending increased nine-fold from \$266 million in 1994 to nearly \$2.5 billion in 2000, largely due to growth in television advertising (13% of DTC spending in 1994, rising to 64% in 2000). DTC spending as a proportion of total spending on drug promotion (\$15.7 billion in 2000) grew from 8.6% in 1996 to 15.7% in 2000. Since 1994, DTC ad spending has risen at an average rate of 45% each year.

Survey Methodology

The results of this project are based on a Web-based survey designed and analyzed by Kaiser Family Foundation staff and conducted among a nationally representative random sample of adults between August 17, 2001 and September 7, 2001. The fieldwork was conducted by Knowledge Networks among its large, randomly drawn, representative national panel of households. Every participating Knowledge Networks household receives free hardware (WebTV) and free Internet access. Participants receive surveys by email, through their television sets, allowing respondents to receive and view video within the context of a survey in their own home and on their own television.

For this study, respondents were divided into two groups, the “viewers”(1,872 people) and “non-viewers” (639 people). In an effort to approximate as closely as possible a “normal viewing environment,” each viewer was shown three ads: a public service ad discouraging young people from smoking, a prescription drug ad, and a new car ad. Viewers were separated into three groups and shown one of three different prescription drug ads: an ad for the medicine Lipitor (manufactured by Pfizer), which treats high cholesterol; an ad for the medicine Singulair (manufactured by Merck), which treats asthma; or an ad for Nexium (manufactured by AstraZeneca), which treats heartburn or acid reflux disease. The non-viewers were not shown any ads. Both the viewers and non-viewers were asked about their past behavior in response to prescription drug ads, and about their knowledge of the medicines and conditions the medicines treat. The viewers were asked to assess the prescription drug ad they just viewed, and the non-viewers were asked to assess prescription drug ads in general.

The margin of sampling error was +/- 2.6 percentage points for the viewers overall, approximately +/- 4.5 percentage points for each of the groups who viewed an ad, and +/- 4.4 percentage points for the non-viewers. For results based on subsets of respondents the margin of sampling error is higher. Please note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error.

Copies of the survey report, *Understanding the Effects of Direct-to-Consumer Prescription Drug Advertising* (publication # 3197), and *Prescription Drug Trends—A Chartbook Update* (publication # 3112), are available online at www.kff.org/marketplace, or can be obtained through the Foundation’s publications request line at (800) 656-4533.

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