

**Lesson Plan: Direct-to-Consumer Advertisements in the United States and Internationally:
How Health Communication Varies Across Borders**

*This lesson has been designed to be taught the week of March 18, 2013 (according to final
COMM 410 syllabus schedule)*

Specific Learning Objectives for this Lesson:

- Students will memorize the definition of health communication
- Students will be able to discuss how advertising (specifically related to prescription drugs) is approached differently in the United States when compared to other countries.
- Students will be able to define Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) advertising.
- Students should be able to think critically about *how* pharmaceutical companies in the United States market their information, and *why* the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has allowed them to do so.
- Alternatively, students will be able to identify characteristics of DTC advertisements. This should engage students in a discussion of the social, economic, and political structures of various countries.
- Students will be able to discuss how issues related to health care are framed differently around the world, answering the question: in what way(s) does health communication differ according to various international perspectives, and why does it differ in these ways?

Outline of the Lecture/Activities for the Class Period (50 minutes total)

I. Lecture (following Prezi presentation) (30 minutes allotted + 20 minute discussion based on discussion questions seen throughout this outline)

A. What is health communication?

1. *"The study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual decisions that enhance health."* (source: CDC and National Cancer Institute)
2. Discuss how "health care" itself is different across many cultures and countries, but having experiences that impact our health is a connection seen on a global scale (e.g. think about the different ways the media presents health care information depending on what country it is referring to...yet, the end result in many countries often involves needing to see a physician or seeking a particular treatment)

B. The components that make up the health care industry are extremely lucrative businesses – focus of this lesson: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of the Pharmaceutical Industry

1. What is Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Advertising?
 - a. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States defines DTC advertising as the promotion of prescription drugs via television, newspaper, magazine, radio, and Internet, as long as the advertisements are accurate and not misleading. The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act permit these advertisements.

- b. The FDA’s position is the DTC advertisements give individuals the opportunity to be educated and informed regarding various medication options in the United States
- c. ...but this has caused a great deal of debate. Critics often claim that the advertisements themselves are misleading, and framed in a way that offers consumers a quick fix. The fear is that patients request more medications without really knowing their side effects or risk factors, and that the pharmaceutical industry promotes drugs to make more money, not to educate.
 - i. The pharmaceutical industry spent \$3.9 billion on United States DTC advertising in 2010 (“The Nielsen company, 2011).
 - ii. Enough drugs are prescribed to equal 11 pills per American each year, and of the estimated \$466 billion spent on prescription advertising worldwide, nearly half (\$215 billion) of this amount is spent by the United States alone (Sagar & Socolar, 2003).
 - iii. Top pharmaceutical companies spend more money every year (approximately \$160 million) on broadcast advertising than on other branded consumer goods, including: Budweiser (\$146 million), Pepsi (\$125 million), and Nike (\$78 million) (United States, 2006). The profit-driven motive can be seen today through a 2003 finding that for every \$1.00 spent on pharmaceutical advertising, pharmaceutical retail sales increase by \$4.20, with this amount increasing each year (“Impact of Direct-to-Consumer,” 2003).
- d. show an example of a DTC television advertisement & ask students to deconstruct it – What do you notice? Who is their target audience? What images are being used? Do you see this as informative?

C. Internationally

- A. The United States and New Zealand are the only two countries in the world that legally permit the advertisement of prescription drugs, while Bangladesh and South Korea permit limited DTC advertising, and some countries permit vaccine advertising because this is seen as a public health issue. All in all, the U.S. and New Zealand are the only countries that fully permit DTC advertising (Frosch et. al., 2007).
- B. Ask students why they think this may be the case?
- C. Answer: Other countries have expressed concern over advertising potentially lethal products to consumers in the same way that other products can be advertised (e.g. prescription drugs cannot be quickly explained in the same way that a cleaning product or beauty product can)

D. Two Examples from Around the Globe – Positions on DTC Advertising

- A. Europe
 - 1. Pharmaceutical companies expressed interest in marketing in Europe in 2002, but it was largely rejected by the European Parliament – there is a direct provision in Europe that prohibits the direct provision of information to patients (Jessop, 2011).
 - 2. Patients have requested more information via the Internet, but parliament struck this down again last year because they believe companies will provide partial information.
 - 3. The parliament has said it is not negating the possibility of DTC advertisements in Europe, but that “it will never take the same form of seen in the U.S. market, which is characterized by low government intervention” (Jessop, 2011).
- B. Australia
 - 1. DTC advertising not permitted, but one study has been conducted to determine citizens’ views on DTC advertisements coming to Australia
 - 2. Out of 619 respondents via questionnaire: findings suggested that Australian citizens do in fact want DTC advertisements as a form of information, they did not believe DTC advertisements would improve the quality of health care, indicated they would not be suspicious of the credibility of the information being presented to them, and were concerned that the price of medications would increase as a result of competition

E. Conclusion

- A. U.S. Perspective on DTC Advertising vs. Other Approaches Internationally
 - 1. Based on our conversations about international communications thus far, what do you see happening in the next 5-10 years? Will other countries follow suit of the U.S. or will the U.S. tighten its regulations? Or, do believe nothing will change? Why?
 - 2. Does having the background knowledge of this industry impact the way you think you will look at DTC advertisements now? What are your views on these advertisements?
 - 3. How may other countries introduce DTC advertisements in a different way? What regulatory changes could be made?
 - 4. Seeing that pharmaceutical companies are expressing an interest in marketing their products on a more international scale, is this considered a form of globalization? Why or why not?