Generalists and psychiatrists selecting antidepressants

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Abstract

Introduction

Antidepressants are drugs that the pharmaceutical industry widely markets to physicians. Medical representative visits (MRVs) and opinion leaders (OLs) are two main sources of information that can guide prescribing habits. We investigated the situation among French-speaking Swiss physicians.

Method

We conducted a qualitative content analysis of 34 semi-structured interviews with generalists, psychiatrists, experts in psychopharmacology (OLs) and medical sales representatives, complemented by direct observations.

Results

MRVs are seldom used by generalists, and are seen as a waste of time. They impose messages that are not considered credible or useful. Psychiatrists are more satisfied by MRVs: the messages are more consistent with their practice. The interactions of medical sales representatives with generalists and psychiatrists are different. Our OLs are local OLs with academic roles in psychopharmacology and are not linked by the pharmaceutical industry. They are charismatic, known and recognized as skilled, and they enable physicians who consult them to shape their prescribing behavior with intellectual confidence. Both generalists and psychiatrists judged the OLs as useful, competent and accredited for CME.

Conclusion

Generalists use local OLs as a preferred antidepressant prescribing tool. We understand why the pharmaceutical industry is interested in using OLs as marketing tools.

In Switzerland, antidepressants are the major group of drugs prescribed both for anxiety and mood disorders (OFS, 2006), particularly since the introduction of SSRI drugs and anxiolytics and are considered to be too much additive. The prescription of antidepressants is often initiated by generalists and sometimes continued and adapted by psychiatrists (Kosel, 2012). antidepressants represent 49% of the psychotropic drugs prescribed by psychiatrists in private practice and 42% of those prescribed by generalists (OFS, 2010).

Better diagnosis (DSM, CIM) and emergence of SSRI (old and new generation) have conducted to enlarge antidepressants prescription which now represent a real important market for pharmaceutical industry. To inform physicians and sell their new antidepressants drugs, pharmaceutical industries use their main strategies: MRVs and OLs.

The Swiss MRV is already a limited way of information for physicians, especially generalists. It is also a declining strategy of promotion of antidepressants and many other drugs for pharmaceutical industry.

MRVs information

- increase and selected by pharmaceutical companies, poor chance to be focused on antidepressants, in person, promotional material, fyer, reminders, invitations answered visits: 1st/year GE: 0,15, 2nd/year GE: 0,35 unannounced visits: around 3 min

Generalists' point of view

- message lacking in credibility
- aware of limited usefulness of the provided information
- drug among thousands, overbooking, lack of time

Industry point of view

- too limited in current, time and frequency

Psychiatrists' point of view

- frustration for GE and pharmaceutical industries
- small benefit for the GE (free samples, invitations, funding of their CME)
- small benefit for the industry (advertising and remembering of its products)

FIG 1. Impact of MRV on physicians - particularly for the Swiss French-speaking community (generalists and psychiatrists) - related to antidepressants

OLs information

- appropriate and multi-brand pharmaceutical messages, selected by the physician, in person, during talks 30 min to 1 hour (CME, congresses, symposia, interventions, etc.)
- high credibility, appetitive, independent, consistent, possibility of exchange, matching the practice needs, valuable digest

 Industry point of view

- high credibility, appetitive, independent, consistent, possibility of exchange, matching the practice needs, valuable digest

Return on OLs

- balanced for physicians and pharmaceutical industries
- benefit for physicians (conference, free samples, invitations to congresses, funding of their CME, relational aspects)
- benefit for the industry (advertising, creating a high memory trace and remembering of its products, open-door)

FIG 2. Classification of a sample of experts in psychopharmacology (n=4) according to our role-based typology of OLs

OLs ROLES in details

L0ls information

- according to our role-based typology of OLs

Physician point of view

- high credibility, appetitive, independent, consistent, possibility of exchange, matching the practice needs, valuable digest

Industry point of view

- high credibility and remembering of its products

Return on OLs

- initially the paradise for physicians and industry
- currently: doubtful for physicians who identify OLs playing regular KOls roles and for pharmaceutical industries who recognize the strategy as unveiled

FIG 3. Impact of OLs on physicians - particularly for the Swiss French-speaking community (generalists and psychiatrists) - related to antidepressants

References