

Making The Rounds – August 2008 Selling Lipitor

by Dr. Richard Kirkpatrick

Ok, so Lipitor's the world's #1 drug in sales, generating \$12,700,000,000 for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, patent owner.

OK, so Pfizer spent \$258,000,000 between January 2006 and September 2007 on direct-to-consumer ads (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines).

What's making the news these days???

It's not the high price of the pill (around \$3-4 per day for those without insurance and about \$1-2 for those with coverage). It's not any question about effectiveness (along with Crestor, it appears to be much better than the generic alternatives simvastatin, pravastatin and lovastatin).

It's that Dr. Robert Jarvik, who invented an artificial heart 20+ years ago, is appearing on TV advertisements. So, why's that a problem? All sorts of athletes appear in commercials (Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, etc, etc, etc). And even Presidential candidate Bob Dole has pitched Viagra and VISA.

Critics say that the commercials showing Jarvik rowing a skull across Lake Cushman (near Port Angeles) used a stunt double. They wonder if Jarvik really takes Lipitor, like he says in the commercial.

Who cares???

And that he is a doctor, so he shouldn't be pitching meds.

Why not? Can't a doctor who has faded into obscurity, make a bundle from doing what every pro athlete does?

The real point is that the pharmaceutical industry spent \$4,700,000,000 last year on TV and radio commercials and newspaper/magazine ads. Think of what \$4.7B would do for poor people, if donated to Boys Clubs, Feed-the-Children, or the Salvation Army. Could a \$4.7B contribution to medical research find a cure for cancer or dementia or diabetes?

Why do we as a society tolerate such spending, which is funded by high prices for prescription drugs?

The reason is pure and simple. ADVERTISING WORKS.

The only way we, as consumers, can affect the strategy of spending egregiously on advertising, is to pay no attention to ads. That means spending less time watching TV, and training our kids and ourselves, to tune out, when commercials come on. Years ago, my dad purchased a device

called The Blab Off. Whenever commercials for alcohol and cigarettes came on, Blab Off silenced them.

Today, with kids watching at least 4 hours of TV daily on weekdays and more on weekends, and stay-at-home adults turning the TV on while they're home, we are sending a message to Corporate America. "The entree into our decision-making is TV."

Let's turn the tube off, read more, exercise more, and make decisions on the basis of facts not ads.

[Down load the rest of this month's "Making The Rounds" newsletter](#) – note...not found

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