

Attitude of Dentists towards Gifts from Pharmaceutical Industry: Cross-Sectional

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gifts are in practice by pharmaceutical industries since almost a century for promotion of their products to develop brand recognition.

Aim: To describe the attitude of dentists working in tertiary care hospitals towards gifts from pharmaceutical industry.

Study design: Descriptive, cross-sectional.

Methodology: The current project was conducted at conveniently selected teaching and training institutions, clinics and departments from tertiary care hospitals in Lahore from 15-10-2018 to 15-03-2018. After having the approval of the ethical review committee for medical and biomedical research of the institution, (n=230) conveniently selected dentists fulfilling the inclusion criteria were enrolled. Information was collected on special questionnaires. Attitude of dentists was assessed towards marketing activities of pharmaceutical industries. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20. Mean with standard deviation was calculated for age. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for qualitative variables. A p-value less than 0.05 considered statistically significant.

Results: In our study, mean age of total sample was 30.66±8.551 years. Majority of participants, 155(67.39%) were unaware of the guidelines regarding the acceptability of gifts from pharmaceutical industries. The p values calculated from lunch and dinner and educational trip (large gifts) are 0.04 and 0.05 respectively.

Conclusion: Present study concluded that there is less knowledge of guidelines about acceptability of gifts. There is need to develop normative guidelines for dentists.

Keywords: Gift, Behavior, Pharmaceutical industry and Doctors.

INTRODUCTION

Gifts are in practice by pharmaceutical industries since almost a century for promotion of their products to develop brand recognition. All physicians should develop their relationship with the pharmaceutical industry. Some are beneficial for the patient or some may be harmful for patient. Small gifts are more acceptable to the doctors than large gifts according to the survey¹.

In contrast, a substantial body of marketing and psychology literature suggests that even trivial items can exert influence irrespective of economic value. For example, adding a small gift such as personalized mailing labels to a solicitation for donations has been shown to significantly increase contributions. In pharmaceutical promotion, small gifts are often tethered to branding efforts, as items such as pens and coffee mugs display logos. Aside from the intrinsic value of promotional items, branded materials strengthen brand awareness and build brand equity through a variety of largely unconscious but powerful mechanisms^{1,2}.

Nonverbal information about the brand, such as symbols or logos, is often more influential than verbal cues. Stronger brands have a memory encoding and storage advantage over unknown brands, which facilitates the formation of strong positive associations with the brand. Strong branded products are more often in a "top-of-mind" set of alternatives for consumers to consider³.

Different doctors have different thoughts about pharmaceutical company relationship. Doctors do not believe that acceptance of gifts as unethical. Many think that receiving gifts ethically correct.¹ Without interaction with drug companies this is impossible to get awareness about new product information in remote areas.² Pharmaceutical companies also provide funds for medical journals, medical society and fellowship programs because continued medical education is essential. Physician prescribing can be affected by pharmacists^{3,4}.

Accepting gifts undermine trust and effect patient's intent to adhere to medical recommendations⁵. Guidance in deciding what should be acceptable is needed. Instituting guidelines on public website is an important step⁶. Therefore, aim of this study was to describe the attitude of doctors towards gifts from pharmaceutical industry so that we can improve the health care system for the population through proper awareness about guidelines.

METHODOLOGY

The current project was conducted at conveniently selected teaching and training institutions, clinics and departments from tertiary care hospitals in Lahore i.e. Punjab Dental Hospital, Children Hospital and Institute of Child Health, Services Hospital, Jinnah Hospital and Mayo Hospital from 15-10-2018 to 15-03-2018. After having the approval of the ethical review committee for medical and biomedical research of the institution, (n=230) conveniently selected dentists fulfilling the inclusion criteria were enrolled. Information was collected on special questionnaires.

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Attitude of dentists was assessed towards marketing activities of pharmaceutical industries. All respondents were given self-addressed envelope to send back the filled questionnaire.

Statistical analysis: The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS version 20. Mean with standard deviation was calculated for age. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for qualitative variables gender, marital status, education, current working status, acceptability of gifts, factors influencing prescription of medication, knowledge of guidelines and selection of drug. Chi-square test was used for qualitative variables e.g., sex, marital status awareness of guidelines, influence of gifts and, influence of large and small gifts and for differences in appropriateness of gifts. A p-value less than 0.05 considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

General parameters (age, job description) for all enrolled patients in present study were presented as frequency and percentage in table-1.

Results for the frequency of small gift acceptance among 230 enrolled patients was shown in table-2.

Results for the frequency of large gifts acceptance among 230 enrolled patients was shown in table-3.

Majority of participants, 155 (67.39%) were unaware of the guidelines regarding the acceptability of gifts from pharmaceutical industries as shown in table-4.

Perception of doctors regarding other doctors about gift acceptance habit was shown in Table-5 with insignificant p-value.

Table-1: General Characteristics Of All Enrolled Patients

Variables	Groups	Frequency	%age
Age (years)	24-34	168	73.0
	35-44	37	16.1
	45-55	25	10.9
Mean ± SD (years)	30.66 ± 8.551		
Job Description	House Officer	98	42.6
	PG	68	29.6
	Dental Surgeon	48	20.9
	Asst Professor	16	7.0
	Primiparous	34	19.5%
	Multiparous	76	43.7%

Table-2: Frequency Distribution of Job Designation with small Gifts

Small Gifts		Designation				P value
		House Officer	PG	Dental Surgeon	Assistant Professor	
Mug	Agree	41(44.6)	26(28.3)	18(19.6%)	7(7.6%)	0.931
	Disagree	57(41.3)	42(30.4)	30(21.7%)	9(6.5%)	
Pen	Agree	62(43.4)	41(28.7)	31(21.7%)	9(6.3%)	0.917
	Disagree	36(41.4)	27(31%)	17(29.5%)	7(8%)	
Writing Pad	Agree	74(47.4)	43(27.6)	29(18.6%)	10(6.4%)	0.19
	Disagree	24(32.4)	25(33.8)	19(25.7%)	6(8.1%)	
Drug Sample	Agree	76(43.2)	50(28.4)	35(19.9%)	15(8.5%)	0.336
	Disagree	22(40.7)	18(33.3)	13(24.1%)	1(1.9%)	
Tooth Paste	Agree	70(43.2)	50(30.9)	31(19.1%)	11(6.8%)	0.728
	Disagree	27(40.3)	18(26.9)	17(25.4%)	5(7.5%)	

Table-3: Frequency Distribution of job Designation with Large Gifts

Large Gifts		Designation				P value
		House Officer	PG	Dental Surgeon	Assistant Professor	
International Holidays	Agree	23(23%)	24(35.3)	14(29%)	6(37.5%)	0.34
	Disagree	75(76.5)	44(65%)	34(70.8%)	10(62.5)	
Dental Chair	Agree	31(31.6)	21(30.8)	17(35.1%)	5(31.2%)	0.960
	Disagree	67(68%)	47(68%)	31(64.6%)	11(68.7)	
Launch Dinner	Agree	29(29.6)	25(36.7)	16(33%)	8(50%)	0.040 [†]
	Disagree	69(70%)	43(63%)	32(66.6%)	8(50%)	
Education Trip	Agree	72(73%)	51(75%)	32(66.6%)	11(68.7)	0.052 [†]
	Disagree	25(25.5)	17(25%)	16(33.3%)	5(31%)	

[†]Statistically Significant

Table 4: Awareness regarding acceptability of gifts from pharmaceutical industry

Awareness of Guidelines about Acceptability of gifts	Designation			
	House Officer	PG	Dental Surgeon	Assistant Professor
Yes	25(25.5%)	20(29.4%)	21(43.8%)	9(56.2%)
No	73(74.5%)	48(70.6)	27(56.2%)	7(43.8%)
Total	98(100%)	68(100%)	48(100%)	16(100%)

P value 0.025

[†]Statistically Significant

Table 5: Distribution of perception about Other Doctors gift acceptance habit

Doctors perception about other doctors	Designation			
	House Officer	PG	Dental Surgeon	Assistant Professor
Agree	55(42.7%)	38(28.8%)	29(22%)	10(7.6%)
Disagree	43(43.9%)	30(30.6%)	19(19.4%)	6(6.1%)
Total	98(100%)	68(100%)	48(100%)	16(100%)

P value 0.803

DISCUSSION

It is the attitude of medical specialist to the receipt of gifts from the pharmaceutical industry against which the ethical appropriateness of accepting gifts can be judged⁷. The study was done to assess attitude of dentists towards marketing activities of pharmaceutical industries. In the study of Morgan et al., (2006), that 77% of respondents thought appropriateness for an informational lunch⁸. Little high value that was 81.8% of respondents who agreed for meetings in restaurants observed by the study of Ferrari et al. (2014)⁹. But in present study only 33.9% of respondents agreed for lunch and dinner. The study conducted by Zaki et al., (2014) showed appropriateness of note pad (63%) similar to the present study (67.8%)¹⁰.

Regarding conference registration fees which is most appropriate promotional gift item in Saudi study by (Zaki et al, 2014) who observed that 67% of respondents accepted

it, same in present study (72.6%) of respondents agreed for it¹⁰.

About awareness of guidelines by Pinto et al., 2005 noted that 62% of respondents were aware of guidelines¹¹ but in study by Tahir et.al., 2014 76% reported that they were not aware of guidelines about meetings with pharmaceutical representatives¹². Same result observed in present study that is 37.6% of respondents were aware of the guidelines.

Present study concluded 57% of respondents agreed that other doctors actually accept gifts these results were also observed in study of Tahir et al (2014) and Steinman who reported that only 16% believed other physicians are unaffected with the acceptance of gifts^{12,13}.

CONCLUSION

Results showed that there is more acceptability of small gifts than large gifts which are more beneficial for the patient like drug samples (76.5%), tooth paste (70.9%) and writing pads (67.8%). We concluded in present study that there is less knowledge of guidelines about acceptability of gifts. There is need to develop normative guidelines for dentists. Therefore, the present study highlighted that there is need for regulations to be imposed by the government, but laws alone cannot reinforce ethical practice, and dentists themselves need to refrain from the negative commercial influences of marketing.

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Limitations: Our study had several limitations like financial constraints and fewer resources. It was a single centre study.

Conflict of interest: None

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