

## Ethical Dissemination of Clinical Information through Advertising and Citation of Research Papers

Timothy Allen<sup>1\*</sup>, Yasmin Allen<sup>2</sup>, Nepton Sheikhkoni<sup>3</sup>, William Moradi<sup>4</sup> and Ariella Allen<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MD, PhD, Cancer Biology and Genetics Program, Sloan Kettering Institute, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY 10065, USA

<sup>2</sup>Student at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

<sup>3</sup>MD, MS, Weill Cornell Medical College of Cornell University

<sup>4</sup>Student at York University, Toronto, ON

<sup>5</sup>Student at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

**\*Corresponding Author:** Timothy Allen, MD, PhD, Cancer Biology and Genetics Program, Sloan Kettering Institute, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY 10065, USA.

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### Abstract

The dissemination of clinical information is crucial for advancing medical knowledge and improving patient care. Ethical advertising and the citation of clinical research papers play significant roles in this process. This paper explores the ethical considerations in clinical information dissemination through advertisements and the citation of research papers. It highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with these methods and provides recommendations for best practices, including specific guidelines from the FDA's Division of Drug Marketing, Advertising, and Communications (DDMAC), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the Prescription Drug Marketing Act (PDMA), and the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). Case studies of known violations by these regulators and health authorities are also discussed.

**Keywords:** *Clinical Information Dissemination; Ethical Dissemination; Clinical Advertising; Research Citation*

### Introduction

The dissemination of clinical information is essential for the advancement of medical science and the improvement of patient outcomes. Ethical considerations are paramount in ensuring that the information shared is accurate, transparent, and beneficial to the target audience. This paper examines the role of advertising and the citation of clinical research papers in the ethical dissemination of clinical information, with a focus on regulatory guidelines from DDMAC, EMA, PDMA, and TGA.

### Ethical Considerations in Clinical Advertising

Clinical advertising, particularly for clinical trials and new treatments, must adhere to strict ethical guidelines to ensure that the information presented is accurate and not misleading. The FDA and FTC provide guidelines to ensure that advertisements do not overstate the benefits or understate the risks of clinical interventions.

- 1. Transparency and Accuracy:** Advertisements must provide clear and accurate information about the clinical trial or treatment, including potential risks and benefits. Misleading claims can lead to false expectations and harm to patients [1].

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2. **Informed Consent:** Advertisements should facilitate informed consent by providing sufficient information for potential participants to make an educated decision about their involvement in a clinical trial [1].
3. **Avoiding Coercion:** Emphasizing financial compensation in advertisements can be seen as coercive. Ethical advertisements should focus on the scientific and altruistic aspects of participation rather than monetary incentives [1].

### FTC Rules and FDA Guidance on Clinical Advertising

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have established specific rules and guidelines to regulate clinical advertising.

1. **FTC Health Products Compliance Guidance:** The FTC requires that health-related claims in advertisements be supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence. This includes ensuring that the claims are not misleading and that they accurately represent the benefits and risks of the product [2].
2. **FDA Guidance on Medical Product Communications:** The FDA provides guidance on how medical product communications should be consistent with FDA-required labeling. This includes ensuring that advertisements do not misrepresent the product's approved uses and that they provide balanced information about the benefits and risks [3].

### DDMAC Citation Guidelines

The Division of Drug Marketing, Advertising, and Communications (DDMAC) within the FDA oversees the promotion of prescription drugs. DDMAC guidelines emphasize the importance of accurate and balanced information in drug advertisements.

1. **Balanced Presentation:** Advertisements must present a balanced view of the benefits and risks of the drug, ensuring that the information is not misleading.
2. **Scientific Evidence:** Claims made in advertisements must be supported by substantial scientific evidence, typically from well-controlled clinical trials.
3. **Clear Communication:** Information must be communicated clearly and understandably to the target audience, avoiding technical jargon that could confuse or mislead.

### Case Study: FDA Violation

**Case:** In 2017, the FDA issued a warning letter to a pharmaceutical company for misleading advertisements about a new drug. The

advertisements overstated the drug's efficacy and minimized its risks [4].

**Outcome:** The company was required to cease the misleading advertisements, issue corrective communications, and submit all future advertisements for pre-approval by the FDA [4].

### EMA Rules on Clinical Advertising

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) provides guidelines for the advertising of medicinal products within the European Union.

1. **Transparency and Accuracy:** Similar to the FDA, the EMA requires that advertisements provide accurate and balanced information about the medicinal product [1].
2. **Scientific Basis:** All claims must be supported by scientific evidence, and references to clinical studies must be clearly cited [1].
3. **Regulatory Compliance:** Advertisements must comply with the specific regulatory requirements of each EU member state, ensuring that local laws and guidelines are followed [1].

### Case Study: EMA Violation

**Case:** In 2019, the EMA fined a pharmaceutical company for misleading advertisements that exaggerated the benefits of a new cancer drug [5].

**Outcome:** The company was fined €1 million and required to retract the misleading advertisements. The EMA also mandated additional training for the company's marketing team on ethical advertising practices [5].

### Comparison of EMA, PDMA, and TGA Guidelines

The EMA, PDMA, and TGA have similar overarching goals in regulating clinical advertising, but there are differences in their specific requirements and enforcement mechanisms.

1. **EMA:** Focuses on transparency, accuracy, and scientific basis, with a strong emphasis on compliance with both EU-wide and member state-specific regulations [1].
2. **PDMA:** The Prescription Drug Marketing Act (PDMA) in the United States sets forth procedures and requirements for the distribution and marketing of prescription drugs, emphasizing the prevention of drug diversion and ensuring that marketing practices do not mislead healthcare providers or patients [6].
3. **TGA:** The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in Australia follows the PIC/S Guide to GMP for medicinal products, ensuring that advertisements are accurate, not misleading, and

supported by scientific evidence. The TGA also emphasizes the importance of good manufacturing practices in the production and marketing of medicinal products [7].

### Case Study: TGA Violation

**Case:** In 2020, the TGA penalized a company for false advertising claims about a dietary supplement [8].

**Outcome:** The company was fined AUD 500,000 and required to issue public retractions. The TGA also implemented stricter oversight on the company's future advertising practices [8].

### Opportunities in Clinical Information Dissemination

The integration of ethical advertising and proper citation practices presents significant opportunities for the dissemination of clinical information.

1. **Enhanced Public Awareness:** Ethical advertising can raise public awareness about ongoing clinical trials and new treatments, encouraging participation and support for medical research [9].
2. **Improved Patient Outcomes:** Accurate and transparent dissemination of clinical information can lead to better-informed patients and healthcare providers, ultimately improving patient outcomes [9].
3. **Advancement of Medical Science:** By ensuring that clinical information is disseminated ethically and accurately, the medical community can build on existing knowledge and drive further advancements in medical science [9].

### Challenges in Ethical Dissemination

Despite the opportunities, there are several challenges associated with the ethical dissemination of clinical information.

1. **Regulatory Compliance:** Navigating the complex regulatory landscape can be challenging for advertisers and researchers. Ensuring compliance with all relevant guidelines is essential to avoid legal and ethical pitfalls [1].
2. **Balancing Information:** Striking the right balance between providing enough information to be informative without overwhelming the audience is a delicate task [1].
3. **Resource Allocation:** Effective dissemination requires significant resources, including time, money, and expertise. Ensuring that these resources are available and used efficiently is crucial [9].

### Recommendations for Best Practices

To maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges associated with the ethical dissemination of clinical information, the following best practices are recommended:

1. **Adherence to Guidelines:** Strict adherence to regulatory guidelines and ethical standards is essential for all clinical advertisements and dissemination efforts [10].
2. **Comprehensive Training:** Providing comprehensive training for researchers and advertisers on ethical dissemination practices can help ensure that information is shared responsibly [11].
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging with stakeholders, including patients, healthcare providers, and regulatory bodies, can help ensure that dissemination efforts are aligned with the needs and expectations of the target audience [12].
4. **Transparency and Disclosure:** Ensuring transparency in the reporting of clinical trial results and potential conflicts of interest is crucial. This includes full disclosure of funding sources and any affiliations that may influence the research [13].
5. **Ethical Review and Oversight:** Establishing robust ethical review processes and oversight mechanisms can help prevent unethical practices in research and marketing. This includes regular audits and the involvement of independent ethics committees [14].
6. **Patient-Centric Approaches:** Prioritizing patient welfare and perspectives in the dissemination of clinical information can enhance the ethical integrity of marketing practices. This involves clear communication of risks and benefits tailored to patient needs [15].

### Case Studies

#### 1. Pharmaceutical Advertising and Ethical Dilemmas

A case study from the Institute for Advertising Ethics highlights the ethical challenges faced by a pharmaceutical company when promoting a new drug. The company exaggerated the benefits of the drug while downplaying potential side effects, leading to public backlash and regulatory scrutiny [15]. This case underscores the importance of transparency and adherence to ethical guidelines in advertising.

#### 2. Ethical Issues in Clinical Research

A study published in the Journal of Business Ethics examined the ethical implications of a clinical trial where the researchers failed to disclose conflicts of interest and funding sources [16]. The trial's

results were questioned, leading to a loss of credibility and trust. This case emphasizes the need for full disclosure and ethical oversight in clinical research.

### 3. Impact of Pharmaceuticals on Social Inequity

An article in the *Journal of Ethics* explored how the focus on biomedical narratives in psychopharmacology can obscure social determinants of health [17]. The case study revealed that while medications can address biological symptoms, they often neglect the broader social context, leading to incomplete treatment approaches. This highlights the importance of considering social factors in medical research and practice.

### Conclusion

Ethical dissemination of clinical information through advertising and citation of research papers is crucial for advancing medical knowledge and improving patient care. By adhering to ethical guidelines and best practices, researchers and advertisers can ensure that clinical information is shared accurately, transparently, and responsibly. This approach not only enhances public trust but also contributes to the overall advancement of medical science.

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