

The Dangers of “Bad Drug” Ads: An Advanced Practice Registered Nurse’s Point of View

An interview with CHLOE VILLAVASO, MN, APRN



Q How would you describe “bad drug” ads?

One-sided. They feature sweeping statements that focus on the worst things that could happen to patients. There’s no mention of the drug’s benefits and no disclaimer to advise the patient to consult their health care providers before making medication changes. These ads may mislead patients.

Q Have you had a patient stop taking a medication due to “bad drug” ads?

Unfortunately, yes. The most recent patient that comes to mind stopped taking his diabetes medication because he was convinced it was bad for him. He referenced seeing an ad on TV that made him stop his medication.

My practice is mainly geared towards preventive cardiology - treating high cholesterol, hypertension and other risk factors to prevent heart attacks and strokes. For my patients, abandoning their medications can lead to dangerous health consequences.

Q How do these ads affect the patient-health care provider relationship?

“Bad drug” ads can compete with health care providers for a patient’s trust. This presents an

even greater challenge in patient populations that are suspicious about the health care system. In the Black community, especially the older generation, many lack trust in health care. This group of people has a higher rate of cardiovascular disease and related risk factors.

“Bad drug” ads exploit patients’ insecurities and can keep at-risk patients from seeking the care they need. Ultimately, it’s the patients who suffer. Driven by fear and misinformation, they may choose suboptimal care or abandon treatment altogether.

Q How can physicians fight back for their patients?

One way is staying up to date on current research and guidelines. When patients come to me with concerns about their medications, I take time to listen. I explain how the latest research supports the benefits of the medications. We discuss potential side effects and, through shared decision making, agree on the best treatment plan.

Legislators also have an important role to play. We need policies in place that keep these ads honest and transparent so patients understand who’s providing this information and are advised to consult their health care provider prior to making medication changes.

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