



HYPE Will Upset Pharma

The pharmaceutical industry is not going to like **HYPE**, the recently published book whose subtitle promises to inform readers about *medical myths, exaggerated claims, and bad advice—and how to tell what is real and what is not.*

This book delivers what the author promises. Her writing challenge was how to explain to ordinary readers the complicated and complex realities of what is known, not known—and unexpectedly can change—about how drugs work and interact in our bodies. The author, Dr. Nina Shapiro, is the Director of Pediatric Otolaryngology and a Professor of Head and

Neck Surgery at UCLA.

Dr. Shapiro pulls it off with drug explanations in plain English backed with informative anecdotes from over 30 years of medical training and practice. Of special interest to my fellow consumerists are her comments on free-range foods and fish, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and *incidentalomas*, which are tumors accidentally found when looking for something else: “Sometimes finding them can save your life, but sometimes finding them can end it.”

Her chapter on *Complementary Alternative Medicine* is particularly incisive. An excerpt:

Perhaps since time immemorial we as humans have been vulnerable prey for alternative treatments and approaches that buck tradition. We want to *be* the anomaly—the outsider—the one who beats the odds and statistics, especially when it comes to an illness as scary and grave as cancer.

Dr. Shapiro has seen the results—and imminent dangers—of hyping drugs. The pharmaceutical industry fully understands the power of using the tools of propaganda to convince consumers to buy drugs. They spend millions on their promotions—all worked into the selling prices of drugs—and lobbyists to protect their interests.

Sophisticated marketers hype drugs with highly effective disinformation techniques that help sell prescription and non-prescription drugs. Their promotions are first tested on focus groups and only then expertly targeted to overcome consumer resistance to advertising. The success of these campaigns is evidenced by their continual use. And make no mistake, ad marketing is costly. Obviously if the pharma industry did not see evidence of success in sales connected to the power of hype, ad orchestration would have changed long ago.

More exposure for consumers about harmful drug promotion is needed, especially in the current political environment because consumer protection is not high on the agendas of both political parties this election year. Dr. Shapiro's book will increase consumer awareness of pharmaceutical industry connivance with drug information. (Perhaps copies should be sent to all the candidates for Congress this November.)

To "protect" their promotional practices, the pharmaceutical industry opposes regulations that might pull back the curtains around the marketing costs of drugs, which at times can be greater than the development costs of drugs. Pharmaceutical folks will not like this book because it could arouse consumer curiosity about marketing hype, which is exactly why consumers and their doctors should read it.