



**National
Medical
Association**

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**African-American Doctors Say DTC Ads
Improve Doctor-Patient Relationships and Educate Patients**
2006 Survey Shows NMA Doctors More Positive Toward DTC Ads Now Than in 2001

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 7, 2007) – The National Medical Association (NMA) today released results of a membership survey that overwhelmingly indicate that NMA physicians are even more positive toward direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising now than they were in 2001. Further, NMA physicians said that consumer-focused advertising of prescription medications provides substantial educational benefits and enriches the doctor-patient dialogue.

Respondents also expressed specific concerns about the advertisements, prompting the NMA to call for changes to consumer advertising practices to increase the benefits of DTC advertising for minority populations. The survey comes at a critical juncture in the DTC advertising debate; the pharmaceutical industry has been implementing voluntary improvements to its consumer advertising practices and legislators are considering imposing stringent regulations.

“Since its inception, the NMA has advocated for the elimination of health disparities and championed optimal health practices for African Americans and other underserved populations,” said Dr. Albert Morris, NMA president. “Education is key to achieving both of those goals and, according to our members, consumer advertising for prescription medicines helps educate patients. Our goal is to build on that inherent value by working with the pharmaceutical industry to make these communications even more helpful to underserved populations.”

In 2001, the NMA issued a landmark study that gauged African-American physicians’ perceptions of DTC advertising, its impact on the doctor-patient relationship and, perhaps most importantly, its role in educating underserved populations about critical health issues and

potential treatments. This 2006 survey builds on the first, gauging not only current perceptions, but also how the community's understanding of DTC advertising has changed since 2001.

Notably, the percentage of respondents who perceived a positive benefit from DTC advertising grew from 2001 to 2006, while the percentage who were "unsure" waned. The majority of respondents cited a positive benefit for patients, physicians, managed care organizations, government health organizations and pharmaceutical companies, with significant jumps in benefits seen for patients (from 55% to 66%) and physicians (from 42% to 65%).

The specific educational benefits of DTC advertising that NMA physicians reported include:

- Making patients aware of treatment options (80%);
- Alerting them to medical problems earlier (64%); and
- Promoting better patient education regarding disease states (58%).

In addition, nearly half (45%) of physicians surveyed agreed that DTC ads are a beneficial educational tool for patients in underserved communities.

Respondents also noted that consumer advertisements of prescription medicines enhance the doctor-patient relationship. Respondents reported that DTC ads:

- Trigger patients to seek their doctors' opinions (80%);
- Prompt thoughtful questions (73%);
- Promote better discussions in an office visit (60% – a 12 percentage point jump from 2001); and
- Motivate patients to visit their doctors (49% – a 13 percentage point jump from 2001).

"The DTC advertising environment has changed considerably since our 2001 survey," said Dr. Valentine Burroughs, co-author of the survey report. "Perhaps most significantly, the pharmaceutical industry has taken measures to reinforce the doctor-patient relationship and address the other concerns voiced by critics. What we've seen in our survey is that there is a measurable difference in how African-American doctors view DTC advertising since the implementation of these changes."

While NMA physicians saw the benefits of DTC advertising outweighing its drawbacks, they also identified several concerns about DTC ads:

- The majority of physicians surveyed (76%) indicated that DTC advertising makes people think that medicines work better than they do.
- 76% said that DTC advertising confuses people about the relative risks and benefits of a medication.
- Two-thirds (65%) said that DTC advertising can increase patient second-guessing or questioning a diagnosis.
- 54% said they feel pressure to prescribe a specific medicine because of DTC advertising, though 42% feel no pressure.

“While progress has been made, there is still room for improvement,” noted Dr. Sandra Gadson, immediate past president of the NMA and report co-author. “The NMA is committed to identifying and advancing initiatives that will increase the benefits of these advertisements to minority populations and help us eliminate existing health disparities through education.”

The NMA has issued recommendations for improvements to DTC advertising to ensure that the needs of the African-American community are being addressed. The NMA calls upon the pharmaceutical industry to:

- Create more DTC ads around chronic disease states that significantly impact minority communities;
- Provide information to health care professionals prior to any new marketing or promotional campaign directed to patients;
- Commit to publicizing its prescription payment assistance programs to minority communities in DTC advertising;
- Increase the presence of DTC ads in traditionally African-American outlets to reflect a balanced presence in the mass media;
- Increase cultural diversity and sensitivity in its ads; and
- Create ads that encourage patients to be partners in their health care.

In addition to working with the pharmaceutical industry to consider the interests of African-American physicians and patients relating to DTC advertising, the NMA will provide continued input and expertise to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other governmental agencies in reference to DTC advertisements.

The NMA conducted this representative survey of 322 member physicians during its 2006 Annual Convention in Dallas. The full survey report as published in the March issue of the *Journal of the National Medical Association* was also submitted to the FDA's DTC advertising docket. For more information on the report, visit: www.nmanet.org. This survey was made possible through an unrestricted educational support grant issued by Pfizer Inc.

The National Medical Association

The National Medical Association (NMA) is the nation's oldest and largest professional organization representing the interests of more than 30,000 African-American physicians and 24 medical specialties. The NMA was established in 1895 and remains committed to improving the health status and outcomes of African Americans and underserved populations. For additional information about the NMA, visit: www.nmanet.org.

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