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SHOULD DRUG COMPANIES BE ALLOWED TO ADVERTISE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ON TV?

Word Generation - Unit 2.18

Focus Words

disclaimer | prescribe | potential | assume | rely



Weekly Passage

In 1997, the law was changed to allow drug companies to advertise prescription drugs on television. Each year since there have been more of these ads. Television ads are required to provide disclaimers about the risks of each drug. Typically, such disclaimers are stated very quickly while good-looking actors distract the viewers. In 1991, drug companies spent \$55 million on advertising. By 2003, they were spending \$3 billion. The average number of prescriptions per person in the United States has also increased. In 1992, that average was 7.3. By 2000, it was 10.4.

Prescription drug advertisements have the potential to be helpful. They often provide useful information. They can lead people to talk to their doctors instead of ignoring a health problem. Yet this advertising also causes some problems. Many people who go to the doctor assume they need a certain drug that might not be right for them. Doctors can feel pressured to prescribe the medication that the patients ask for. This might mean that the patient takes an expensive drug when there are less costly alternatives available. Advertisements might also

lead people to think that there is a pill that will solve any problem. This could make them rely on drugs instead of preventing health risks with good diets and regular exercise. Also, they might not know about the risks of taking the medication they see on television. There is not enough time in a typical disclaimer to tell consumers about all of the possible side effects of a drug. The United States is one of only two countries in the world that allow drug companies to advertise directly to consumers

Do prescription drug advertisements help people more than they hurt? Or should drug companies be restricted from advertising on television?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What is a disclaimer?
- ▶ How can prescription drug advertisements be helpful?
- ▶ How are they harmful?

Unit 2.18 - Should drug companies be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television?

Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms		
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes
disclaimer	(n.) - denial of responsibility	disclaim (v.) disclaiming disclaimed disclaims disclaimers (pl.)	claim	
prescribe	(v.) - to order a medicine or treatment	prescribes prescribed prescribing		prescription nonprescription
rely	(v.) - to depend on	relies relied relying		reliance reliable unreliable
assume	(v.) - to decide without much evidence	assumes assumed assuming		assumability assumable assumably assumption unassuming
potential	(n.) - possibility	potential (adj.) potentially	potent	impotent potency

Unit 2.18 -

Should drug companies be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television?



Problem of the Week

Are **prescription** drug advertisements dangerous? Consumers who **rely** on commercials for information about drugs may not get the whole story. These people may not understand the **disclaimers** that talk about side effects. They may ask their doctor to **prescribe** a **potentially** dangerous drug. Drug companies, however, **assume** that they have a right to market their products.

Option 1: In 2006, Americans spent \$216 billion on **prescription** drugs. This amount is about 10% of the country's total health care costs. Given this information, what are the country's total health care costs?

- A) \$2,160 million
- B) \$21.6 billion
- C) \$216 trillion
- ☒ D) \$2.16 trillion

Option 2: One study said that for every \$1 a company spends on consumer advertising, it will have an increase of \$2.20 in sales. In 2006, drug companies spent \$4.8 billion on advertising. If the study is correct, the \$4.8 billion spent on advertising should have caused an increase of how many dollars in sales?

- A) \$7 billion
- B) \$8.4 billion
- ☒ C) \$10.56 billion
- D) \$10.8 billion

Discussion Question: In 2006, drug companies spent \$4.8 billion on consumer **prescription** drug ads. In that same year, drug companies spent \$7.2 billion marketing drugs to doctors. If companies spend billions of dollars trying to convince doctors to use their products, can we **rely** on a doctor's advice? Or does advertising have the **potential** to affect a doctor's judgment? Can we **assume** that doctors' decisions are not changed by advertising? Why or why not? Should we demand a new kind of **disclaimer** in the doctor's office telling us which products have been advertised to our doctor?

Appleby, J. (2008, March 4). Analyzing the side effects of drug ads. *USA Today*. Retrieved on October 23, 2010 from http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-02-29-drugs-inside_N.htm

Should drug companies be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television?

Debating the Issue



I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Drug companies should be able to advertise on television. Advertisements let the public know what kind of medications are available.

B Drug companies should not be able to advertise on television. People might not fully understand appropriate uses and possible side effects.

C Drug companies could advertise as long as they give a complete description of what the medication can and cannot do.

D Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise because advertising increases the costs of medication.

E _____

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

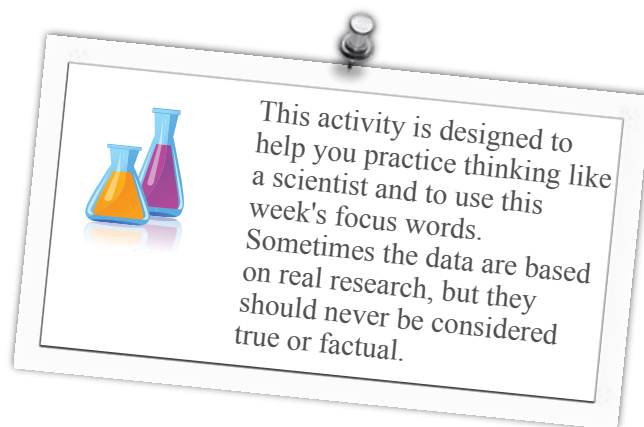
An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

Unit 2.18 - Should drug companies be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television? Science Activity



Professor Kahn's class is debating prescription drug ads.

"TV drug ads are dangerous," says Michaela. "Even if **disclaimers** talk about **potential** side effects, people may not understand the risks. They may ask their doctors to **prescribe** unnecessary drugs."

"You're **assuming** that people can't think for themselves," says Destiny. "I think it's good for drug companies to advertise. Otherwise, people have to **rely** on their doctors to tell them what drugs are out there."

"Will people really try a new drug just because of an ad?" wonders Lawrence.

"Good question!" says Professor Kahn. "A new ad for a weight loss drug airs tomorrow. Let's collect some data!"

Question:

How do prescription drug ads influence behavior?

Hypothesis:

After a new TV ad for a weight loss drug airs, the number of people who hold prescriptions for weight loss drugs will increase.

Materials:

- ▶ 100 people
- ▶ A new TV ad for a weight loss drug

TEACHER

Real Research

-The fictitious WG study reflects a finding from the actual study cited below: ads for a particular drug tend to increase sales in that drug category. However, ads do not seem to increase sales of the particular brand being advertised relative to its competitors. In other words, ads for a specific brand of weight loss drug may not increase people's propensity to seek out that brand over other brands of weight loss drugs, but ads do seem to increase people's propensity to seek out weight loss drugs in general.

Harmon, K. (2009, November 23). How much is that drug ad costing taxpayers? Scientific American. Retrieved on February 18, 2010 from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=how-much-is-that-drug-ad-costing-ta-2009-11-23>

Classroom Discussion

Summarize the real research. (Drug ads increase sales for that kind of drug, but not necessarily for that particular brand of drug.) Are students surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How does the finding connect to this week's topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?

Procedure:

1. Before the TV ad starts to play, record the number of subjects who hold prescriptions for weight loss drugs.
2. Begin to play the weight loss drug ad on TV.
3. Six months later, record the number of subjects who hold prescriptions for weight loss drugs.

Data:

	Before New TV Ad	After New TV Ad
Number of People Who Hold Prescriptions for Weight Loss Drugs	4	7

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

After the new TV ad airs for six months, the number of people who hold prescriptions for weight loss drugs increases.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt

Should drug companies be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television?

Focus Words

disclaimer | prescribe | potential | assume | rely

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.