Melody Petersen’s indictment of drug makers in her book, “Our Daily Meds,” is one in a flood of books published in the last several years. Marcia Angell, John Abramson, Jerry Avorn and several others have written such books. Petersen focuses on the marketing side, which makes it somewhat different. Obviously her bias is shown in the subtitle, “How the pharmaceutical companies transformed themselves into slick marketing machines.”

Her premise is simple. Drug companies, once run by scientists and discoverers of unique drugs, are now marketing-dominated me-too companies. These marketing machines create demand by creating new disease categories and cajoling physicians and consumers into using them. The physician is given financial reward for cooperating and consumers are convinced by slick Madison Avenue techniques that they need these new drugs. Petersen believes consumers do not really understand that these drugs can be dangerous and other, safer remedies exist.

Have drug companies become such slick marketing machines where science is secondary to marketing? Is it really that bad? Ms. Petersen is convinced it is. She has hundreds of anecdotes of slick marketing – some straight brand sponsorships and ad – but others more insidious, such as health screenings where science is secondary to marketing? Is it really that bad? Ms. Petersen believes the marketing-oriented culture is bad for society and clearly that is a fact concern. Her recommendations for improvement are well-presented. She wants doctors to stop taking money from drug companies. She calls for honest science again and a focus on new classes of drugs. She also calls for more balanced efficacy and risk presentations to physicians and consumers. All of these have been put on the table before by other authors. Is Ms. Petersen’s book worth reading? It is.

Drug marketers would benefit by hearing how their tactics are interpreted, and in some cases misinterpreted. Ms. Petersen is a good writer and the book is fast-paced. It is not an objective look at drug marketing, but no recent book has been unbiased.

I am frequently asked, “What is going to happen next year?” And there generally is about as much apprehension in the questioner’s voice about a John McCain presidency as there is about Barack Obama occupying the White House.

Neither senator has the aversion to regulating businesses that was initially expressed by the Bush Administration. A look at the recent past should be a clue. In 2007 law required it for print ads and called for a study of its use in television ads.

In their responses, all four companies opposed adoption of a two-year moratorium on advertising of new prescription drugs. Each said it would require too much effort during the same period. Johnson & Johnson agreed to add the MedWatch number to its broadcast ads. Pfizer said it would include a toll-free number to its broadcast ads. Johnson & Johnson agreed to add the MedWatch number to its broadcast ads. Each said it waits an appropriate period before advertising in order to educate doctors and consumers about new drugs.

The four pharmaceutical companies agreed to voluntarily accept the four pharmaceutical companies agreed to voluntarily accept the four pharmaceutical companies agreed to voluntarily accept the four pharmaceutical companies agreed to voluntarily accept rules set by the FDA. Each said it would consider the drug approval process at FDA. As most of you know, two congressional committees also proposed moratoriums on ads for new drugs, possession of new drugs, and health professionals in DTC ads.

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