

Editorial

Dollars or discretion?

It always makes me cringe to see an advertisement for a product facing the title page of an article where the same product is featured or mentioned. In my opinion, this blurring of the fine line between advertising and information casts aspersions, fairly or unfairly, on the validity of the information in the article, on the integrity of the author(s), and on the primary goal of the journal — is it dollars or discretion?

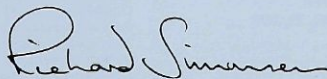
The line between advertising and not-for-profit information should be clearly drawn. There should be no doubt in the readers' minds when they see an article that they are reading technical information, not a paid advertisement. My ire was stirred recently by an article in a controlled circulation magazine — such magazines, heavily laden with advertisements, are distributed to readers free of charge. The article promoted an unproven technique (albeit a conservative treatment option that I personally would like to see succeed) opposite a full-page advertisement for the material used in the procedure, and for the author.

The article was interesting as much for what it did not provide (references) as for what it did (a list of clinical cases exactly as one would expect to see in a set of instructions for a product). There was no attempt made to discuss treatment options or other techniques or to discuss or evaluate in any way the potential problems of the technique. The article was, pure and simple, an advertisement for a particular product disguised as an informational article. Shamelessly included in the text is a recommendation for a kit of burs which the author had named after himself — the ultimate in self-aggrandizement. I am sure the article is already listed in the author's curriculum vitae, and soon will be added to the author's list of "international" publications that I will be quoted in some future self-promotional venue — perhaps in the author's newsletter, also, not surprisingly, named after himself and promoted in the article. In addition, the article referred to the dental laboratory that sponsored the advertisement, including the

toll-free telephone number! Who's scratching whose back here?

The advertisement, like the article, was without one single reference. It promoted this unproven technique with boundless claims of clinical superiority. The advertisement contained a section with a photograph of the author of the article that followed on the facing page with the claim that this self-proclaimed expert has "successfully seated over 3000" of these restorations. Incidentally, the identical photograph used in the advertisement appeared in the adjacent article in the section identifying the author and his list of "credentials." I really think I would be more interested in learning how many of the restorations survived, rather than how many the author has placed. But then this would take a study, with data, which takes time, effort, and scientific integrity and expertise — not to mention that the data may not stack up too well against alternative techniques.

This example of blurring the line between advertising and clinical information is a slap in the face to the reader's intelligence and ethical sensitivity. I think I will pass up the opportunity to join the author of the article at a seminar in the Bahamas (also promoted in the advertisement). When he and the companies with which he apparently is affiliated begin to show some respect for the ethical considerations and sensitivity of being a member of a health profession, I may listen.



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