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FDA investigates direct to consumer adverts

Testimony on direct to consumer advertising in hearings held last week by the US Food and Drug Administration was widely divergent. Consumer advocates blasted prescription drug adverts as misleading while industry representatives said that they educate the public.

Two days before the hearings, Rachel Behrman, deputy director of the agency's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, told the US Senate's Special Committee on Aging that the agency believes that, "done properly, prescription drug advertising can assist consumers in taking a proactive role in improving their health."

Drug companies spent \$4.1bn (£2.4bn; €3.5bn) on consumer advertising in 2004 in the US, the only nation that allows such adverts since New Zealand declared a moratorium on drug adverts from December 2004.

The FDA's requests for public comment were focused on managing—not banning—advertising. None the less, more than 200 medical professors signed a petition asking the FDA to ban the advertising, calling it misleading and "not educational" (*BMJ* 2005;331:1040, 5 Nov).

Jeanne Lenzer *New York*

Surgeon suspended for "pushy Americans" comment

A consultant orthopaedic surgeon who told a severely ill teenager to "pull himself together" has been suspended from practising for six months by the General Medical Council.

The council's fitness to practise panel heard that Fergus Paterson, aged 57, dismissed the boy's worried parents as "pushy Americans" when they suggested that he had developed sepsis after an operation to reset a fractured elbow.

The boy, known only as

Sweet foods increase breast cancer risk

Regularly eating sweet foods, including biscuits, ice cream, honey, and chocolate, may increase the risk of breast cancer. Results from a large case-control study of more than 5000 Italian women have shown that the effects may be significant: "If real, the excess risk for frequent sweet consumption may account for 12% of breast cancer cases in this Italian population and, therefore, is far from negligible on a public health level," say researchers in a report in *Annals of Oncology* (published online on 25 October; <http://annonc.oxfordjournals.org>; doi: 10.1093/annonc/mdj051).

Results from the study show that compared with women who consume less than the lowest tertile, women with the highest intake of desserts (including biscuits, brioches, cakes, puffs, and ice cream) had a multivariate odds ratio of 1.19 (95% confidence interval 1.02 to 1.39) and women with the highest intake of sugars (including sugar, honey, jam, marmalade, chocolate) had a multivariate odds ratio of 1.19 (1.02 to 1.38).

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

patient A, broke his arm in summer camp in the United States in 2003, and was treated for his injury there. Soon after, the family returned to the United Kingdom and saw Mr Paterson for a check-up at the private Cromwell Hospital in London.

Mr Paterson recommended a further operation to stabilise the fracture, which took place on 11 July 2003. But he failed to administer prophylactic antibiotics before surgery.

Four days after his discharge patient A's mother called Mr Paterson to say that he was tired and listless with a temperature of 38.3°C.

Mr Paterson saw patient A the next day and maintained that the boy had a "gastric bug," advising his parents to take him home. The next day, patient A was readmitted to the hospital with evidence of severe sepsis. He recovered only "after

extremely aggressive emergency treatment," said Andrew Hurst, for the council.

Owen Dyer *London*

US panel recommends young children receive hepatitis A vaccination

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended that all children in the United States between the ages of 1 and 2 years receive a two dose vaccination against the hepatitis A virus.

Hepatitis A vaccines were first licensed in 1995. Since 1999 the government has recom-

mended hepatitis A vaccinations for children in 17 states where rates of the disease were highest. But the success of these campaigns seems to have levelled off, and health officials fear rates might rebound.

About a quarter of hepatitis A cases occur in children, but many adults contract the disease from infected youngsters. In 2003, nearly 600 people developed hepatitis and three died in the nation's largest outbreak (*BMJ* 2003;327:1188).

It is believed the new policy would prevent 100 000 hepatitis A virus infections and 20 deaths over the lifetimes of each group of children vaccinated. The direct costs of the vaccine programme, currently \$22m (£13m; €19m) would increase to \$134m a year.

Fred Charatan *Florida*

First NHS funded live liver transplant programme to go ahead

The first live liver transplant programme to be funded by the NHS will begin at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh next April. Liver transplants from live adult donors already take place in several countries, including Japan, the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. But most of these transplants in the UK have been in children and those in adults have been funded privately.

The programme will boost the options available to seriously ill patients, who currently have to rely on whole organ donations from dead donors. Currently, about one patient a month dies in Scotland while waiting for a transplant, and others have to be removed from the waiting list after becoming too ill to have surgery.

Edinburgh's transplant unit, which already transplants live kidneys, has a target of five live liver transplants next year, 10 in 2007, and about 15 in 2008. The programme is likely to expand further as patients and their families become more aware of it.

Bryan Christie *Edinburgh*