

The Impact of DTC Print and Television Advertising on Antidepressant Use

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Abstract

In this paper we test the hypothesis that exposure to DTC advertising for antidepressants affects individual use of these medications, as well as their self diagnosis (reported prevalence) of depression. We examine whether the ads have a different effect depending on the medium in which they appear (print versus television), whether there is an interactive (reinforcing) effect when a consumer is exposed to both media, and whether the effects differ for men vs. women. Prior studies have almost exclusively relied on making connections between national or market level advertising and national or individual level usage of medications. This is the first study to consider the impact of individual-level exposure to DTC advertising on individual level use of antidepressants, and the first to consider the relative impact of pharmaceutical advertising in two different media (print versus television). We find that consumer advertising impacts antidepressant use and depression self diagnosis, for both women and men, and through both print and TV. The overall magnitude is about a 1 percentage point increase in self diagnosis of depression and a 2 to 4 percentage point increase in antidepressant use from being exposed to more than the median number of ads (relative to no ads); for TV the effects are 1 percentage points and 8 percentage points respectively. The effects on antidepressant use are present only for women. We find no evidence of an interactive effect of the two media.