

Correspondence

Re: Marketing Messages in Continuing Medical Education (CME) Modules on Binge-Eating Disorder (BED)

To the Editor: Jung and Berman¹ suggested medical education companies were not compliant with The Standards for Commercial Support: Standards to Ensure Independence in CME ActivitiesSM required by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. Medscape, an accredited provider for over 20 years, has strict policies and procedures that prevent commercial influence on our content. We take every accusation suggesting otherwise very seriously and reviewed the 3 Medscape activities mentioned in the article for validity of the claims made by the authors. Here are our findings:

- All 3 Medscape activities were developed free from influence by commercial interests, including the identification of the educational need, selection of faculty, development of learning objectives and content, dissemination, and outcomes evaluation.
- Two of the 3 Medscape activities were independently peer reviewed prior to posting online and the reviewers found the content to be aligned with the learning objectives and free of bias.
- Two of the 3 Medscape activities are largely text based; 1 is a blend of text and video; the slides mentioned in the article are not in our content.
- Across all 3 Medscape activities, all slides were originally created by Medscape and were not supplied by the faculty.
- The claims in the paper about promoting lisdexamfetamine as a safe and effective drug for binge-eating disorder and/or weight loss do not appear in any of our activities. Rather, the lisdexamfetamine is rarely mentioned as our 3 activities were developed prior to availability of phase-3 data; and when mentioned, it was categorized correctly as a stimulant.

Throughout the article the authors regularly refer to the “CME modules” as a whole and even in their Discussion section state that some of their claims are more conjecture rather than proven. Because of this, we feel strongly that Medscape was guilty by association by having posted content on this topic within the sample time of the study. It is unfortunate the authors had a forum to spread misinformation to propagate their own agenda.

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To see this article online, please go to: <http://jabfm.org/content/33/5/816.full>.

Reference

1. Fugh JJ, Berman A. Marketing messages in continuing medical education (CME) modules on binge-eating disorder (BED). *J Am Board Fam Med* 2020;33:240–251.

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The above letter was referred to the author of the article in question, who offers the following reply.

Response: Re: Marketing Messages in Continuing Medical Education (CME) Modules on Binge-Eating Disorder (BED)

To the Editor: No one disputes that drug companies provide educational grants for continuing medical education (CME); as the largest CME provider in the country, Medscape receives substantial funds from industry. In this case, all 3 Medscape activities^{1–3} were funded by Shire.

Medscape’s modules on binge-eating disorder (BED) contain many marketing messages, including linking BED to obesity, and linking lisdexamfetamine with weight loss. Omissions are important, too: not one of Medscape’s modules mention that lisdexamfetamine, like other amphetamines, has a high potential for abuse, and other serious harms including stroke and sudden death.

Medscape’s CME activities specifically link obesity with BED; stating, for example, “Anyone who presents with weight concerns should be asked about binge eating.”¹ The correct answer to 1 test question is “Most people with obesity demonstrate binge-eating behavior.”² Another test question asked:

“Mary, a 36-year-old woman, comes to your office with complaints of a “sore back.” She stands 5 ft 6 in tall and weighs 265 lb. A radiograph reveals no disc or vertebral problems. You are concerned that her sore back may be due to her weight. Which of the following is the most appropriate treatment approach?”^{1,4}

The correct answer is, “Ask, in the privacy of the examination room, if she has trouble with binge eating.”⁴ The far more rational answer, “Emphasize that she is obese and should go on a strict diet and exercise regimen” is deemed incorrect.