

OTHER RESOURCES

Selected websites with articles related to the marketing of drugs and diseases:

www.newyorkmetro.com

New Yorker Magazine feature articles:

- “Inside the Happiness Business,” May00
- “Pill Culture Pops,” Jun03
- “Are You Bipolar?” Mar04
- “Pop. Snort. Parachute,” Oct04

www.prozacspotlight.org

Includes discussion boards with people both supporting and opposing the marketing and wide use of antidepressant drugs

www.mercola.com

Articles and commentary written by a medical doctor on news stories about a variety of health issues, including the use of antidepressants by young people

www.newint.org

In November, 2003, *New Internationalist* magazine dedicated a complete issue to “Big Pharma.” Includes an article written by Alan Cassels, the expert who appears in this documentary.



Little Boy Blue

DISCUSSION AND VIEWING GUIDE

SYNOPSIS

Over 11 million American children took antidepressant drugs in 2003. And the numbers are growing quickly—particularly among children aged five and younger. ***Little Boy Blue*** blends startling statistics with expert testimony, a mock public service announcement and words-from-the-mouths-of-babes to deliver a message that is a hard pill to swallow.

University of Victoria drug-policy researcher Alan Cassels asserts “the [pharmaceutical] industry is in basically two businesses—the business of creating chemicals and the business of creating disease.” He examines the manipulative advertising techniques employed by drug companies and points out that

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they spend more money educating doctors about drugs than all medical schools in Canada combined. He also highlights the research of Dr. Andrew Mosholder, a senior epidemiologist at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In 2003, Mosholder found that children given antidepressants were nearly twice as likely to become suicidal.

CURRICULUM FIT

Personal Life Management (9-12)
Social Sciences and the Humanities (9-10)
English (10-12) – Media Studies

PREPARING FOR STUDENT RESPONSES

This video features an expert health policy researcher who explains the role that drug marketing plays in convincing the public to take antidepressants—often for conditions that could be more successfully addressed with non-pharmacological approaches.

Some students may be taking anti-depressants or other pharmaceutical drugs for behaviour-related conditions. These students may feel uncomfortable during the post-viewing discussion of the video.

Teachers should ensure that conversation focuses on the nature of pharmaceutical drug marketing and the media's portrayal of drug effectiveness, not on whether or not the children actually need the drugs. Clearly, some children and young adults do benefit from taking medication.

Selected list of possible side effects from antidepressants:

1. Abdominal pain
2. Agitation
3. Anxiety
4. Blurred vision
5. Constipation
6. Diarrhea
7. Drowsiness
8. Dry mouth
9. Gastrointestinal disturbance
10. Headache
11. Insomnia
12. Liver inflammation
13. Nausea
14. Seizures
15. Skin rash
16. Sleep disruption
17. Stroke
18. Urinary retention
19. Weight gain
20. Weight loss

Analyse opposing opinions:

Have students do a web search for the following key words:

- Antidepressant
- Suicide
- Teens or children
- Depression

Ask students to find one example of an article that downplays the increased risk of suicide by teens who take antidepressants and another article that supports this thesis. Have them compare the two articles. Ask them to identify where statistics may be misleading, where evidence may be weak, where opinions are presented as facts, and so on. Ask them to decide which article is most credible and explain why.

OTHER RESOURCES

Websites seen in the video:

www.social-anxiety.org

www.paxil.com

www.celexa.com

www.lexapro.com

www. Effexor.com

www.zoloft.com

www.prozac.com

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the United States, drug companies are allowed to advertise their products directly to the public. We know that drug advertising has a direct impact on individuals asking their doctors for the drugs they have seen on television or in magazine ads. Canada currently does not allow the same level of direct-to-consumer drug advertising as the USA—although we are now allowing more than we used to. What are the benefits and drawbacks of increasing direct-to-consumer drug advertising in Canada?
2. Many forms of communication contain manipulative elements, intended to make the reader or viewer draw a specific conclusion. What conclusions did the director of this documentary want the viewer to draw? What specific techniques were used in this documentary to lead the viewer to draw these conclusions? (Emotional music, scripted scenes, children saying drug side effects, selective statistics, the abrupt ending).
3. Do you think our society's growing use of prescription drugs is more of a medical problem or more of a social problem?
4. Teens are often targeted by government and non-profits with anti-drug messages, such as the "Just Say No" campaign. But teens are also targeted by drug companies as potential consumers for pills to cure everything from depression to hyperactivity to excessive

sweating to acne. What characteristics can street drugs and prescription drugs share in common? Why do you think the government discourages teens from using street drugs but allows teens to take sometimes addictive prescription drugs, that have never been tested on children or teens?

5. The rate of antidepressant prescriptions has increased dramatically over the last three years in the United States. In what ways do you think influences like television news, daily newspapers and magazines have contributed to this increase? What world events could be contributing to people feeling more depressed, scared and feeling they are unable to cope with life?
6. What would you consider the signs of depression that should be treated with antidepressant drugs, as opposed to the normal emotional ups-and-downs that all teenagers experience?

EXTENSIONS

Create a drug ad:

Break the class into small groups of three or four students. Have each group decide on a typical teen problem that they would love to solve by simply taking a pill (for example acne, shyness, sweating hands on a first date, new hair growth). Ask each group to create a poster or advertisement that sells



an imaginary pharmaceutical drug to cure this teen condition. Provide them with the following list of techniques to incorporate into their poster or ad, to help them convince their peers to take their new drug:

1. A clever name for the new drug.
2. Image of a person that the target audience looks up to—someone whom they respect.
3. Words and expressions that the target audience uses—the way they talk to each other.
4. Description of the problem being solved or cured at its most extreme, its worst.
5. Description or images of how perfect life would be without this problem.
6. An easy action for the target audience to take—such as “ask your doctor about this drug,” or “visit this website to read more.”