

Responsible drug advertising: An investigation into the marketing and promotion of COVID-19 preparations on social media in KwaZulu-Natal



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1. Background

- Ethical and honest promotion and marketing of drugs whilst ensuring safety and efficacy is essential.
- Self medication increased on potential treatments shared on social media
- Accessing treatments advertised online during COVID-19 was tempting and it led to an increase in self-medication

2. Aims and Objectives

Aim

- To investigate the ethical dimensions of responsible drug marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic

Objectives

- To explore ethical malpractices in misinformation and misleading advertising of drugs on various media platforms
- Suggest ethical guidelines that could support and promote responsible drug use in the community.

3. Methods

- We conducted a qualitative study that assessed availability, knowledge and usage of COVID-19 repurposed drugs amongst 18–25-year-olds in urban KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
- Three community engagement workshops with 18–25-year-olds and health professionals in the health personnel participating in prescribing and dispensing medicines.

4. Topics discussed

18–25-year-olds

- Knowledge, understanding, views of medicinal/traditional drugs advertised
- Concerns around drug advertisements
- Awareness on the risks of drug marketing for their age group

Professionals

- Pharmaceuticals and drugs targeted at 18–25-year-olds
- Ethical guidelines in the promotion of drugs on the internet-SAHPRA
- Malpractices
- Recommendations

5. Results

- There was a gap in COVID-19 treatments targeted for 18–25-year-olds
- Lack of mistrust on drugs promoted on social media
- Lack of information on the guidelines in dosage and use of traditional African medicine
- Advertising and marketing promoted repurposed drugs and substances without evidence of efficacy and proper medicinal regulation

6. Conclusion

Key take home messages

1. Drug advertisements during the COVID-19 pandemic lacked ethical and acceptable standards
2. There was a gap in COVID-19 treatments targeted for 18–25-year-olds
3. Create awareness of ethical malpractices in online drug marketing
4. Community outreach research that concertises the public on the dangers of misleading/ misinformation shared on the internet regarding pharmaceuticals and complementary/phytomedicines