

HDL, LDL: What the Hell?

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Many Americans have certain rituals they follow to remind them to take their medication. The pharmaceutical companies are among the most profitable and influential businesses in the world. This is why it is in their best interest to make sure people remember the medications by name so they can request them from their doctors, or recognize them on the shelf at the store. One of the problems with many medication advertisements is that to target a specific group of people, the ads often use various stereotypes. In a 2010 Lipitor commercial, the ad clearly targets the male audience between the ages of 45 and 60. The advertisement uses the stereotype that men with health issues will not ask questions and blindly do what they are told.

The advertisement is set outdoors, on the shores of a mountain lake. It opens with a man looking at a rope tied to a tree which hangs out onto the lake; right below, is a rocky shore. The man says, "I can't believe I used to swing over those rocks. I took some foolish risks as a teenager" (Pfizer, 2011, 00:01). Then he talks about having high cholesterol and being at risk for stroke and heart attack. As the man bends down to pet his trusty dog by his side, he says to the audience, "When diet and exercise weren't enough for me. I stopped kidding myself" (Pfizer, 2011, 00:13). The setting changes to a view of the lake and the following appears on the screen, "ALONG WITH DIET, LIPITOR LOWERS BAD CHOLESTEROL 39% to 60%" (Pfizer, 2011, 00:21). The man and his dog start walking along the shore, and the camera zooms out to show the scenery of the lake and forest. During their walk, the notes of melody that is playing in the background become more sustained; a woman, who is not seen, notes that Lipitor may not be for everyone, but a simple blood test performed by your doctor can determine if Lipitor is right for you (Pfizer, 2011, 00:33). The man, once wearing a shirt and pants is now down to just some swim shorts as he and his dog are walking up to the pier. At this point the woman's voice is

abruptly interrupted by the man shouting to his dog, “Let’s go boy! C’mon!” as they run off the pier and jump into the lake (Pfizer, 2011, 00:46). The man is then holding onto the pier and half in the lake when he tells the audience, “If you have high cholesterol, you may be at higher risk for stroke and heart attack,” then after a pause once again says, “Don’t kid yourself” (Pfizer, 2011, 00:51). As the commercial ends, he is seen swimming in the lake and the words “DON’T KID YOURSELF” are in the middle of the screen (Pfizer, 2011, 00:54).

The advertisement uses a “plain folk” type of persuasion technique, where the actor is dressed and acts like a regular day to day person (Media Literacy Project, n. d., p. 8). This is the opposite method of using a doctor or celebrity to endorse the product. There has been a long-standing assumption that men do not take well to authority. By using the plain folk technique, it is clear that society still does not always trust doctors to make the best decision for a person’s health. The opinion of a friend, or someone viewed as an equal, has more bearing than a medical professional.

The most offensive stereotype in this advertisement is the idea that women nag men about things they can ignore. Strategic thought went into the attempt to get men to ignore the disclaimer of the medication. The woman was intentionally not shown to keep the audience focused on the man and his dog. The melody was manipulated to drown out the woman’s voice so it would not catch people’s attention. By using these techniques, the medication company is suggesting to men that they know what they need to do, and there should not be anything that anyone can tell them that should change their mind.

Ironically this commercial repeatedly tells the viewer to not kid themselves, and to stop taking foolish risks. Although the ad makes a wise suggestion that people should control their cholesterol, it does so by means of taking a pill. While Lipitor might be effective at lowering

cholesterol, it is important to note the medication has a disclaimer pamphlet longer than most restaurant menus. We live in a society that tries to get us to view problems through rose tinted glasses. Many people end up falling victim to the belief that a pill will cure them, and even if by taking it causes another problem later on there will be yet another pill for that problem.

Whether it's because some people trust that doctors and pharmaceutical companies are looking out for their wellbeing, they simply believe taking medicine will cure their illness, they are often the target of the idea that a pill is the solution to the problem. There are many reasons an individual might have elevated cholesterol numbers, but the pharmaceutical companies are quick to label people as having high cholesterol. As Dachis (2011) tells us, we should "consider the negative aspect of the products that definitely aren't being shown to you" ("Don't Forget to Think," para. 3) when watching ads for medication. The sad reality is that these companies play on the fact that many people do not know better and will not ask questions, therefore when presented with what seems to be a solution to their problem they blindly follow.

References

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