

GENERAL PRACTITIONER v BAYER

SortEDin10 campaign

The Director of the Authority noted an article in the Financial Times on 17 February critical of the SortEDin10 disease awareness campaign relating to erectile dysfunction (ED) run by Bayer Healthcare. The Director wrote to the author, a general practitioner, drawing attention to relevant cases already considered, pointing out that one element of her criticism had not previously been considered. It was established practice to follow up media criticism of the promotion of prescription medicines. The author subsequently submitted a complaint.

The complainant stated that the criticisms were primarily that the advertisements encouraged men to think that ED could be 'sorted' in 10 minutes. A GP consultation might typically be that long; however this did not reflect the time that would be needed over several consultations for physical examination, exploration of psychological issues and follow up. Prescribing medication was realistically possible in 10 minutes but did not allow time for medical care to encompass the problem fully. In this way the advertisement pushed expectations that something would be 'sorted' in 10 minutes but in fact this would only be the start of the intervention. This was not fair on patients or doctors. It was unrealistic and unhelpful as information as it was so biased.

The Panel noted that the material was aimed at those who believed they had erectile dysfunction but who were too embarrassed to make the initial approach to their GP. Given the embarrassment that might be associated with erectile dysfunction and patients' reticence when discussing it, the Panel considered that the phrase 'SortEDin10' in the advertisements at issue referred to the fact that a ten minute GP consultation would be a significant first step along the road to addressing the condition. In that regard the Panel noted Bayer's submission that, at their first GP visit, a significant proportion of men would be prescribed Cialis, Levitra or Viagra and that these medicines were effective in around 80% of patients. Nonetheless, the Panel did not consider that members of the public would be led to believe that erectile dysfunction would be completely resolved by a GP after one ten minute consultation. No breach of the Code was ruled.

The Director noted an article in the Financial Times on 17 February critical of the SortEDin10 disease awareness campaign relating to erectile dysfunction (ED) run by Bayer Healthcare, Pharmaceutical Division. The Director wrote to the author, a general practitioner, drawing attention to relevant cases already considered, pointing out that one element of her criticism had not previously been considered. It was established practice to follow up media criticism of the promotion of prescription medicines. The author

subsequently submitted a complaint.

COMPLAINT

The complainant stated that the criticisms were primarily that the advertisements encouraged men to think that ED could be 'sorted' in 10 minutes. A GP consultation might typically be that long; however this did not reflect the time that would be needed over several consultations for physical examination, exploration of psychological issues, probably also blood tests, and follow up. Prescribing medication was realistically possible in 10 minutes but did not allow time for medical care to encompass the problem fully. In this way the advertisement pushed expectations that something would be 'sorted' in 10 minutes but in fact this would only be the start of the intervention. This was not fair on patients or doctors. It was unrealistic and unhelpful as information as it was so biased.

When writing to Bayer the Authority asked it to respond in relation to Clause 20.2 of the Code.

RESPONSE

Bayer submitted that SortEDin10 was a disease awareness programme designed to support men with ED. The launch in 2005 included national advertisements which ran until September 2005 and aimed to raise awareness of the campaign. Copies of these advertisements were provided. Currently, SortEDin10 took the form of patient leaflets (provided) which were distributed in surgeries and clinics, and a website which was currently being rectified and would be live again in April.

The objective of SortEDin10 was to encourage men who believed they had ED, and were typically too embarrassed, to make that initial approach to their GP. This would be for assessment and where appropriate, treatment.

Ten minutes reflected the average length of a planned GP consultation. The aim of SortEDin10 was to reflect what was normal in general practice and not to mislead or raise unfounded hopes. During a ten minute consultation the patient's ED could be treated in a number of ways with or without medicines. Some of the non-medicinal treatment options, eg change of existing medication for another condition or lifestyle changes, were likely to be suggested by the GP as part of the initial ten minute consultation. In addition a referral to a psychosexual counsellor could be agreed as an appropriate course of action.

70% of those for whom treatment with medicines was

considered an appropriate course of action typically received a prescription on their first GP visit for ED. 99.9% of these patients would receive a prescription for a PDE5-inhibitor which were effective in around 80% of patients. Bayer believed therefore, that for many men, their first consultation was highly productive.

In summary, SortEDin10 was designed to encourage men with ED to seek help from their GP. Bayer reiterated that SortEDin10 accurately reflected what was normal in general practice during an average planned 10 minute consultation and was neither misleading nor attempted to raise unfounded hopes. Bayer denied a breach of the Code.

PANEL RULING

The Panel noted the complainant's concern that the advertisements in the SortEDin10 campaign pushed patient expectations that erectile dysfunction would be sorted in a ten minute GP consultation whereas the consultation would only be the start of the intervention. The Panel noted that each of the three advertisements provided by Bayer featured the prominent 'SortEDin10' logo accompanied by phrases such as: 'See your GP about your erection difficulties, all it takes is ten minutes' and 'Only a ten minute pit stop. I took a ten minute pit stop to see my GP about

my erection difficulties...don't be embarrassed to say to your doctor 'I need ten minutes to talk''.

The Panel noted that the material was aimed at those who believed they had erectile dysfunction but who were too embarrassed to make the initial approach to their GP. Given the embarrassment that might be associated with erectile dysfunction and patients' reticence when discussing it, the Panel considered that the phrase 'SortEDin10' in the advertisements at issue referred to the fact that a ten minute GP consultation would be a significant first step along the road to addressing the condition. In that regard the Panel noted Bayer's submission that, at their first GP visit, a significant proportion of men, for whom treatment with medicines was considered appropriate, would be prescribed a PDE5-inhibitor (eg Cialis, Levitra or Viagra) and that these medicines were effective in around 80% of patients. Nonetheless, the Panel did not consider that members of the public would be led to believe that erectile dysfunction would be completely resolved by a GP after one ten minute consultation. No breach of Clause 20.2 was ruled.

Complaint received **9 March 2007**

Case completed **27 April 2007**