

# WMA GUIDELINES ON PROMOTIONAL MASS MEDIA APPEARANCES BY PHYSICIANS

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## PREAMBLE

Mass media can effectively play diverse roles in medical communication. Physicians, as professionals and experts can contribute to improved public health by providing the public with accurate health related information. Mass media provides a channel through which physicians may contribute to society by leveraging mass media appearances in positive ways.

However, the increase in instances of physicians' frequent appearances on mass media to recommend unproven treatments or products and to use such appearances for marketing purposes is posing a serious concern. The public may readily accept groundless recommendations by physicians and may develop unrealistic expectations. The subsequent confusion and disappointment can damage the patient-physician-relationship.

This issue is more serious in some countries where there are different systems of medicine, including alternative medicine.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The WMA recommends the following guidelines regarding mass media appearances by physicians to prevent them from being involved in commercial activities that may compromise professional ethics and to contribute to patient safety by ensuring physicians providing accurate, timely, and objective information.

### **Accurate and Objective Delivery of Scientifically Proven Medical Information**

1. When appearing in media, physicians shall provide objective and evidence-based information and shall not recommend medical procedures or products that are not medically proven or justified.
2. A physician shall not use expressions that may promote unrealistic patient expectations or mislead viewers about the function and effect of medical procedures, drugs or other products.
3. Physicians shall include important information including possible adverse effects and risks when explaining medical procedures, drugs, or other products.

### **Not Abusing Mass Media as a Means of Advertisement**

4. Physicians should not recommend specific products by either specifically introducing or intentionally highlighting the name or trademark of a product.
5. Physicians shall practice prudence regarding personal appearances on home shopping programs. The physician should have no financial stake in the products being sold.
6. Physicians shall not be a part of mass media advertisement on any product, which is harmful to human, and/or environment.

### **Maintaining Professional Integrity**

7. Physicians shall not require or receive economic benefits for mass media appearances other than a customary appearance fee.
8. Physicians shall not provide economic benefits to broadcasting personnel in order to secure mass media appearances.
9. Physicians shall not engage in the promotion, sale or advertising of commercial products and shall not introduce false or exaggerated statements regarding their qualifications such as academic background, professional experience, medical specialty and licensure as a specialist, for the benefit of the economic interests of any commercial entity.

