#IAmHHS: Fighting Misleading Prescription Drug Ad Claims

July 3, 2017 By Mike Sauers

These days, you can hardly turn a magazine page, watch a TV show or sit in the lobby of your doctor's office without seeing advertising and promotions for prescription drugs. They're everywhere you go. And they tend to be impressive and reassuring. But are they accurate?

A big part of my career at the Department of Health and Human Services has been about helping to make sure those ads are truthful and not misleading.

At the FDA, I'm staff supervisor of the Office of Prescription Drug Promotion's (OPDP) Advertising and Promotion Policy Staff, which helps develop policies for advertising and promotion of prescription drugs across the United States. In my job, I help make sure that drug companies' communications of information about their prescription drugs to consumers and healthcare professionals are truthful and not misleading. In my role, I also help to make sure our stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry understand the rules of the road.

I started my career as a drug representative in Philadelphia, promoting a pharmaceutical company's drugs. It was a good job in a great industry.

But to be 100 percent honest, it was not personally fulfilling and I decided to pursue public service. I went back to school, earned a master in public policy from Georgetown Public Policy Institute (now McCourt School of Public Policy), and then joined HHS as a budget analyst in the Office of the Secretary through the Presidential Management Fellows Program. Working in the Office of the Secretary gave me the chance to see many of the incredible programs that HHS operates to help improve the lives of Americans on a daily basis.

After my fellowship ended, I decided to continue my HHS career at FDA by focusing on a subject area I knew very well: prescription drug advertising.

I became a regulatory review officer in OPDP and looked at specific ads aimed at doctors or consumers to make sure the claims were truthful and not misleading.

That work prepared me to move into my current role in OPDP where I lead the group that helps develop industry-wide policies for all prescription drug advertising and promotion. One of the highlights of my government service was co-creating the Bad Ad Program, an initiative designed to educate health care providers about misleading prescription drug promotion and to make it easier

for them to report this activity to the agency.

It’s an awesome responsibility and very challenging, but I truly believe I am making a difference by helping to ensure that advertisements provide accurate and truthful information about the effectiveness and potential risks of prescription drugs.

You just can’t quantify the type of job satisfaction that comes from knowing that every day you come to work, you have the opportunity to make an impact.

I’m Mike Sauers. I work for the FDA and I am HHS.

Mike is one of more than 79,000 people who make HHS run every day. You can share his story and see others on Twitter and Facebook using #IAmHHS.

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