

Outlook on Lifestyle

DR. GOTT



Peter Gott, M.D.

Sales tactics change with time

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

Drug companies always have relied heavily on person-to-person contact to encourage physicians to prescribe certain medicines, especially new ones. Pharmaceutical representatives pay regular visits to doctors' offices, hoping to nail the doc for a five-minute spiel about the company's most recent development, thereby enlightening the physician and ensuring that he or she will prescribe one brand in place of competing varieties. These reps are called "detail men" for reasons that are unclear to me; perhaps this age-old title came about because these unsolicited salesmen insisted on giving solicitous details about drugs.

I have had no particular aversion to detail men. They have always been aggressively enthusiastic and genially obsequious as they go about their cardboard talks — but they are an inconvenience. They tend to materialize, unannounced, freshly scrubbed, smelling of Old Spice, dressed in shimmering polyester suits and Windsor knots, the moist palm extended, at

just the time that I am trying to finish some task. They inexplicably arrive at the moment I usually have something else to do, something that is suddenly very important. Almost as a reflex, I tell my secretary: "No, I can't see the Wyeth man today. Ask him to leave some samples."

This is the major value of detail men to thousands of busy physicians: the free samples. By careful selection — that sometimes includes letting detail men actually enter my consulting room and dribble words down their wash-and-wear shirts — I usually can wheedle a satisfactory supply of free drugs for my personal self-indulgence: tranquilizers, pain pills, cough medicine, antibiotics — all useful to the practicing doctor.

You see, the average M.D. doesn't give a tinker's dam for all the chitchat, the hyperbole, the salesmanship, the promises or the scientific data cooked up by the detail men. All that business is simply ritualistic foreplay in order to obtain the free samples. As more and more healers got smart and refused to see detail men — demanding samples instead — the drug companies must have smartened up, too. They're not sending out detail men anymore; they send out detail women. This is changing the rules, and I think it's unfair.

A few days ago, my secretary stuck her head in my door and, with a sly smile, announced that the Merck representative was waiting to see me. After some grumbling, I grudgingly complied. I wish I hadn't, because I wasn't prepared for this representative. She was very tall, very blond, very confident and very pretty. Honey-colored hair cascaded down her

high cheekbones and framed her wide-set limpid blue eyes. Her earth-tone makeup was impeccably applied to velvety skin. As far as I could see, her teeth were perfect, as were her pink blouse and her trim gabardine suit and all contained therein. She slid into the chair and opened her briefcase that was cradled on knees, which made my glasses fog up. She talked about a new medicine for hypertension, but I don't remember what she

said. As I accepted the printed brochure, I forgot to ask for free samples. Then she was gone, leaving promotional material and the provocative scent of eau de something-or-other.

Now all I'm left with are memories — and studies of an ACE inhibitor. She said she'd be back in a month.

Drug detailing isn't what it used to be. Hiring beauty queens to sell medicine to unsuspecting, egocentric,

burned-out old docs is unsportsmanlike. What will the pharmaceutical industry think up next? How am I going to have time to see patients? What about my free samples? How can I get through the next month with just the brunette from Lederle and the redhead from Parke-Davis? When can I meet the Doublemint twins? As you can observe, the modern practice of medicine is fraught with many formidable questions.

DEAR MEG



Meg Whitcomb

Matchbook tips off hubby's affair

By Meg Whitcomb

DEAR MEG — I have reason to believe my husband has been seeing a woman who lives in Brooklyn.

We live in the Bronx and have never visited anyone in Brooklyn. But when we went to a wedding there last month, I said, "I wonder what the apartments are like in this part of the world." Fred said, "Great." When I said, "How do you know?" he stuttered and stammered, and said someone had told him so. Then he dropped the subject like a hot potato.

In addition to that incident, a friend told me she saw my husband at a club

in that area a few months ago. Then there was a book of matches from a steakhouse in Brooklyn. When they fell out of Fred's pocket, he couldn't account for them.

I've been giving him the benefit of the doubt, but he has been attending more and more "business dinners" and "meetings" — both evenings and weekends — and my doubts are growing. What do you think? — WONDERING WIFE

DEAR WONDERING — I think if there's a matchbook from Brooklyn, there could be a fire in Flatbush.

The wife is usually the last to know about an affair — even when other signs, such as after-hour "dinners" and "meetings," point the way. Studies suggest that as many as half of all married men and somewhat fewer married women have had affairs. Yet a 1986 report by the American Psychiatric Association quotes survey data showing that only 8 percent of respondents suspected their mates of being unfaithful.

DEAR MEG — For four years, I have brought birthday and anniversary gifts to my daughter and son-in-law's house. They just say thank you and never ask me to sit down and talk. My son-in-law's birthday was last

month, so I went over with a present. They came out in the yard, took the gift, and went back in the house, leaving me standing there. I was so appalled that I drove down the block and waited to see what was up. Sure enough, they got in their car and drove over to his parents' house.

When Ann came to see me the following week, I told her the gifts were finished, period. She flew into a rage, picked up the umbrella stand, and threw it through my picture window. Am I right never to speak to either of them again? — FUMING IN CHICAGO

DEAR FUMING — There's more going on here than meets the eye. I sense a tremendous amount of repressed anger between you and your daughter, and her outburst indicates that it's been simmering under the surface for a long time.

Rather than cutting them off, you would be wise to examine the real motives behind her behavior.

Write to Meg in care of this newspaper. Meg can only answer letters that contain a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Questions of general interest will be discussed in future columns.

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