Call for papers

Standardizing and marketing drugs in the 20th century

Conference to be held at the Institute for the History of Medicine, Charité, Berlin
7-8 October 2010

Deadline:	15.01.2010
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The standardization of drugs and the modern drug as a brand article is an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand standardization has been used in marketing, either becoming synonymous for quality and for the certified absence of toxicity, or as a guarantee of efficacy when related to the know-how and the experience of pharmacists and firms. The notion of controlled and homogeneous therapeutic preparations has for instance played a critical role in the first half of the twentieth century as a means used by large industrial pharmaceutical companies to distance themselves from pharmaceutical shops, from the making of 'secret remedies', and from the preparative culture of combination and formulas. This use of standards for marketing purposes is not limited to the technical and material aspects, i.e. those related to the homogeneity of products: it touches all dimensions of standardization including its administrative and clinical aspects. For instance, following the transformation of controlled clinical trials into legal requirements for marketing authorization, the results of "well-conducted" trials (i.e. standardized and statistically-based tests by elite physicians) were included within the qualities of a marketable therapeutic agent, and became part of the resources used by pharmaceutical representatives when visiting general practitioners.

But at the same time, standardizing conflicts with marketing. This conflict originates in two aspects: First, marketing focuses on the uniqueness and specific qualities of a product in opposition with its competitors in spite of the fact that these are either analogs granted with similar therapeutic properties or even contain identical active principles in the case of generics. Accordingly, the great variety of trademarks for antipyretics, benzodiazepines used as sleeping pills, insulin preparations or hormonal contraceptives contrasts with the remarkable chemical and pharmacological homogeneity. Drug standardization not only reinforces this homogeneity: it is the one the central claim of contemporary drug regulation that therapeutic agents with the same active ingredients display the same pharmacological properties. Standardization seems to oppose a second feature of marketing, namely the individual or local adaptation of products. Drug marketing thus stresses the intimate fit between the needs of a given patient and the drug promoted, while industrial standardization seeks to eliminate all differences between the elementary units of a series or a production batch. These contradictions are deeply rooted in historical and contextual settings.

The aim of this workshop will therefore be to inquire if, how, and up to which point the history of drug marketing can inform the history of drug standards and standard drugs, and *vice versa*. Special emphasis will be placed on the changes of marketing practices from mere publicity dominated by trademarks and announcements to "scientific marketing". This peculiar form of marketing – one which mobilizes all forms of scientific information elaborated within the context of corporate or academic pharmaceutical R&D to shape medical

practices and construct drug markets -- became dominant after World War I. As scientific marketing included the making and circulation of in-house periodicals, the commissioning of articles, the organization of medical meetings, developing a system of prep-representation as well as conducting market research and socio-economic surveys, it maintained a complex relationship to drug standardization, a relationship which deserves historical scrutiny.

Fields of Interest

- The role of marketing within the history of pharmaceuticals, and its role in the history of the consumption of pharmaceuticals.
- Pharmaceuticals as brand articles/Branding techniques
- Market research in pharmaceuticals as a precondition of marketing
- Patterns of drug use as mirrored in marketing campaigns (national, gender, diseases, age etc.)
- Prescribing practices as patterns of standardization
- Actors of standardization: The Doctor, the Patient, the Industry.
- Counter-strategies to standardization as a marketing tool