

Information to patients

While there is broad consensus on the importance of an “informed patient”, the role that pharmaceutical companies should play in responding to increased patient demand for health information remains controversial. On the one hand, the need for a better information to patients on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, including from drug companies is recognized, on the other hand concerns over improper advertising versus unbiased educational information if they communicate directly and frequently with patients. Together with the industry, Novartis strives for high ethical standards in all aspects of its communication to patients.

Novartis Position

Novartis believes that providing patients with broad access to balanced information about the medicines they take is in the best interest of both the patient and society. Informed patients have greater health and disease awareness. They are more likely to practice preventive measures and to seek timely, effective diagnosis and treatment. Society gains because a better-informed patient is a healthier patient who is less likely to draw healthcare and social benefits and more likely to be a productive participant in the economy.

Patients can and should receive accurate health information from a wide range of sources, among which pharmaceutical companies have a legitimate role to play. Given the extensive knowledge that pharmaceutical companies have about their medicines, Novartis believes it should be possible for them to provide patients with appropriate information about these medicines, consistent with local regulatory agency guidelines.

While Novartis respects and adheres to existing local regulations on consumer and patient information about prescription medicines, we believe strongly in the value of ‘direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising of medicines. In countries where DTC advertising is allowed, we believe that it has been shown clearly to enhance patient disease-awareness and support prompt, effective therapeutic intervention, while not adding measurably to expenditure on drugs, increasing drug prices, or interfering in an unacceptable way with the doctor-patient relationship.

Within the European Union (EU), we support greater provision of information to patients and advocate for pharmaceutical companies to play a role alongside other health information-providers. Within the EU, citizens of individual member states now have access to very different levels and quality of information about health and medicine. We advocate EU harmonization of patient information consistent with current practice in those member states that have the greatest experience in this field (e.g., UK and Sweden) and support the six principles proposed by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) for advancing the provision of medicines information.

We recognize the Internet as an important medium for the transmission of healthcare and medicines information and support the principles advanced by EFPIA to guide the quality and standards of website pages sponsored by medicines manufacturers.

As an appropriate way to regulate the provision of medicines information to the public, whether promotional or non-promotional, Novartis advocates a co-regulatory system, where strong industry self-regulation is overseen directly by an expert third party. In supporting such a system, we stress our continuing commitment to adhere to high standards of marketing conduct, as prescribed in our Promotional Practices Policy, and to ensure that all our corporate product information is fair, balanced and scientifically based.