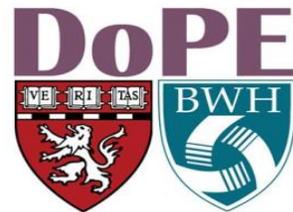


Navigating a disorienting health care landscape

Jerry Avorn, M.D.

Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School
Chief, Division of Pharmacoepidemiology and Pharmacoeconomics
Department of Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital
Co-Director, NaRCAD
Chief Clinical Consultant, Alosa Health

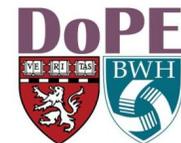


Perspectives from the last year,
the last century,
and the last half-millennium

...and a glimpse into The Future

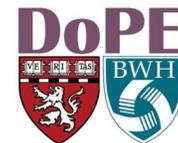
Conflicts of interest

- Most of the research in my Division is funded by NIH, AHRQ, FDA, and PCORI.
- No-one in my Division accepts personal compensation from any pharmaceutical or device manufacturers.
- The Division does accept unrestricted research grants from drug companies to conduct specific drug safety studies.
- All the academic detailing work described is done on a non-profit basis, and I receive no payment for it.



“Who do you trust?”

- TV quiz show, 1957-1963
 - premise
- Now: a society-wide erosion of faith in established sources of “truth”
 - growing doubts about institutional integrity
 - fiction purveyed as fact on Facebook, Twitter, Google
 - ‘fake news’ accusations against mainstream (=true) journalism
 - reality increasingly defined by those with an agenda to promote
 - public condemnation of science as biased and phony
 - e.g., climate change
 - *Merchants of Doubt* – Naomi Oreskes & Erik Conway
- Implications for academic detailing
 - This title is **THE** question relating to prescription drug use in 2017-2018, and beyond



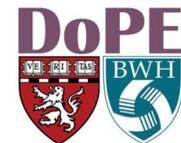
Since the last NaRCAD conference...

- signing of the 21st Century Cures Act, December 2016
 - urges FDA to be more open to looser approaches to drug approval
 - surrogate measures (“drug development tools”)
 - non-conventional trial designs
 - patient-reported outcomes
 - “real-world evidence”
- confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to Supreme Court, April 2017
 - effect on First Amendment attacks on FDA’s right to regulate drug promotion
 - “commercial free speech”
 - This will further move the Court toward undermining such regulation



Since the last NaRCAD conference, continued

- Appointment of Scott Gottlieb as FDA Commissioner: May 2017
 - business-oriented American Enterprise Institute, close industry ties
 - opponent of ‘over-regulation’ of drugs
 - wrote about FDA regs as a hazard to health
- Ongoing assault on Obamacare and Medicaid funding: Jan. 2017 – present
 - This makes appropriate, cost-effective prescribing even more urgent
- Continuing revelations about the role of dis-information in helping to create the opioid crisis
 - “Empire of Pain,” P. R. Keefe, *The New Yorker*, October 30, 2017
 - Presidential Commission report, November 1, 2017



It's been a very long year.

- The dissemination of accurate, unbiased, evidence-based information about medications is a microcosm of the dissemination of accurate, unbiased, evidence-based information about everything else.
 - On both fronts, this crisis of trust could lead to:
 - further degradation of the belief that what any source claims is actually true;
 - proliferation of multiple sources of “information” that are often bogus, self-serving, and wrong
 - e.g., InfoWars, Pizzagate, advertisements for dietary ‘supplements’
- OR, it could lead to....*
- re-discovery of the importance of evidence-based, vetted facts that meet high standards of accuracy
 - e.g., good newspapers and broadcast media, an even stronger FDA, and strengthening of programs like academic detailing to disseminate the best medical evidence.

“When you get to a fork in the road, take it.”

-- Yogi Berra

This brings us to the cosmic perspective part of the talk.



Two recent anniversaries that may be useful examples

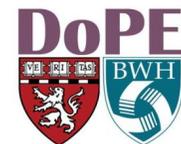
- 500 years ago last week: The Protestant Reformation
 - proliferation of 'new media' led to questioning What Is Really True
 - brought attention to – and curbed – many excesses of dominant paradigm
 - this was then followed by excesses of its own.
 - led to centuries of bloody violence
 - now: that's beginning to settle down, mostly
- 100 years ago last week (or next week, in the Georgian calendar): The Bolshevik Revolution
 - brought attention to – and curbed – many excesses of dominant paradigm
 - this was then followed by excesses of its own.
 - led to decades of bloody violence
 - now: less famine, oppression less violent, but still a mess



1972: Zhou En-Lai asked for his opinion about the French Revolution

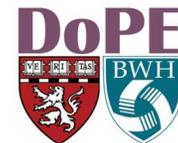
“It’s still too early to tell.”

(What really happened: He thought he was being asked about the French student protests of 1968.)



So what does all this mean for academic detailing?

- Our work on generating and disseminating information about medications (and other medical interventions) is marinating in this current, strange moment in history, in which we are all awash.
 - Fish don't notice water.
- But it is also part of much longer, ongoing trends in science and medicine.
 - Ignaz Semmelweis: Viennese obstetrician who discovered cause of childbed fever, with excellent clinical results
 - early attempts at academic detailing, c. 1850s.
 - died in a mental hospital
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes (the doctor, not the jurist, who was his son)
 - made the same point, but better
 - became Dean of HMS
 - his other famous observation about drugs



Trends: good ones and scary ones

- Continuing evolution of health care systems
 - In U.S., organization into accountable care organization-like systems is proceeding apart from craziness of coverage erosion
 - Untenable costs are driving it, esp. on the part of employers. This will continue.
 - Europe, Canada, rest of world continue to evolve normally
- Threats to swimming upstream
 - Salmon, herring = Alosa
 - They know where they came from, and where to go back to to spawn new offspring
 - New dams are being built, and other dams are being removed
 - This October: some salmon not returning to their rivers of origin for the first time ever.

In the U.S., it sometimes feels like those of us who do this work are like medieval monks

- During the brutal Middle Ages, while heathens were bashing each other with truncheons, the monks lived quietly in their abbeys, reading and transcribing the wisdom of the ancient Greeks.
- When civilization was eventually ready for it, those manuscripts helped pave the way for the Renaissance.
 - see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve*, 2011
- Shit happens. Things change.
- [apologies to our colleagues from Europe and Canada, who have already had their Enlightenment]



Summary and conclusion

You're on the cutting edge. Hang in there.

