

**Direct-to-consumer advertising of
prescription drugs:
Can evidence inform policy?**



The suggestion to ‘ask your doctor’ if this medicine is right for you is a constant refrain on US TV, including US satellite and cable TV reaching Canadian audiences. What do we know about the effects of this advertising on public health, health care costs, the patient-doctor relationship, and people’s knowledge of the effects of medicines?

This presentation will begin with a brief introduction to Canadian and international policies on prescription drug advertising, followed by a review of the research evidence, and a discussion of the link – or lack thereof – between current policy trends and the body of existing evidence. In Canada, these issues are currently playing out in a little-publicized court case in which Canada’s largest media company, CanWest, is challenging the federal prohibition of direct-to-consumer advertising.

BIO:

Dr. Barbara Mintzes is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology, Pharmacology & Therapeutics at UBC, and a Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research Scholar. She holds a PhD in Health Care & Epidemiology from UBC and a BA in geography from Simon Fraser University. The main focus of her research is on pharmaceutical policy, including the effects of direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs on prescribing and medicine use. She is the coordinator of an international project co-sponsored by the World Health Organization and Health Action International to develop curriculum on drug promotion for medical and pharmacy students. She also works with UBC’s Therapeutics Initiative’s Drug Assessment Working Group and the Common Drug Review to carry out systematic reviews of the clinical trial evidence on beneficial and harmful effects of new drugs. She has worked for many years with women’s health groups and consumer organizations, with a focus on representation of public interests in drug policy. She is a member of the Steering Group of Women and Health Protection and on the advisory board of *La Revue Prescrire*.