

# PharmedOut 2020



What a year 2020 was! After Georgetown closed, we moved PharmedOut to an undisclosed location and continued to investigate pharmaceutical industry influence on healthcare in 2020. Given the unique challenges of COVID-19, our successes from this past year are a testament to our team's resilience and commitment to advocating for rational healthcare.

Thank you to all of our donors and volunteers who helped make this year possible.

Adriane Fugh-Berman MD, Caroline Renko, and Patricia Bencivenga MS

## Publications

Former intern Jinhyun Jung PharmD and Dr. Fugh-Berman published "Marketing Messages in Continuing Medical Education (CME) Modules on Binge-Eating Disorder (BED)" in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*. The article dissected how CME was used to promote Vyvanse (lisdexamfetamine) off-label for weight loss.

Judy Butler, Sharon Batt, Olivia Shannon and Dr. Fugh-Berman published "Pharmaceutical Ethics and Grassroots Activism in the United States: A Social History Perspective" in the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*.

Judy Butler and Dr. Fugh-Berman exposed WEGO Health, an industry vendor that pairs "patient influencers" with companies to market drugs to targeted audiences. "Patient Influencers Paid By Pharmaceutical Companies Should Be Required To Disclose Industry Ties" was published on the *Health Affairs Blog*.

Dr. Fugh-Berman wrote an op-ed on tramadol that was published in the *Columbus Dispatch* that discussed tramadol, an unpredictable drug that many patients and physicians do not know is an opioid.

Dr. Fugh-Berman defended randomized controlled trials in a letter to the editor published in the *Washington Post*, "Rushing convalescent plasma therapy for covid-19 isn't wise".

## Projects and Events

PharmedOut launched the [PharmaBait](#) library, an extensive collection of hundreds of images of pharmaceutical promotional items. Organized by the name of the promoted drug and the manufacturer, these images are on PharmedOut's website and can be used in classes, presentations, and other educational events.

We hosted three virtual events in 2020. PharmedOut held our first webinar, "Institutional Corruption and Clinical Practice Guidelines," on August 17th. Our speakers, Lisa Cosgrove PhD and Joel Lexchin MD, joined us for an enlightening discussion about financial conflicts of interest that bias clinical practice guidelines.

Our second webinar, "Honor, Shame and Exile: The Moral Geography of Whistleblowing in Research on Human Subjects," with Carl Elliot MD, PhD was held on November 2nd.

PharmedOut screened [Medicating Normal](#), a documentary addressing overprescribing and long-term problems associated with antidepressants. We held a panel discussion after the film screening with Dr. Anna Lembke, an addictions expert featured in the film.

PharmedOut joined the [International Society of Drug Bulletins \(ISDB\)](#) as an associate member. Founded in 1986, the ISDB is a world-wide network of pharma-free bulletins and journals on drugs and therapeutics.

Dr. Fugh-Berman testified about Purdue's reformulation of Oxycontin at a [Joint Meeting of the FDA Drug Safety and Risk Management and the Anesthetic and Analgesic Drug Products Advisory Committees](#) on September 11, 2020. Dr. Fugh-Berman testified, "what abuse-deterrent formulation prevents is criticism," and "the best ways to prevent addiction and overdose deaths is through fewer opioid prescriptions." Dr. Fugh-Berman's written testimony can be accessed [here](#).

## Media Coverage

In January, Dr. Fugh-Berman appeared in a [Washington Post documentary](#) on the opioid epidemic, commenting about how industry persuaded physicians to prescribe opioids.

Dr. Fugh-Berman was quoted in a [STAT News article](#) about a New York Academy of Sciences conference funded by Johnson and Johnson that focused on conflicts of interest. "This is a conflict of interest conference with a conflict of interest," said Fugh-Berman.

In May, Dr. Fugh-Berman was quoted in a [Consumer Reports article](#) about off-label prescribing and coronavirus.

Former project manager Alessandra Hirsch, now an OB/GYN at the University of Chicago, wrote an [op-ed for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review](#) calling for student loan forgiveness and the challenges healthcare workers were facing during COVID-19.

Jinhyun Jung PharmD and Dr. Fugh-Berman's study on marketing messages in CME was highlighted in a [Mad in America article](#) in May.



## Media Coverage

Dr. Sharon Batt and Dr. Adriane Fugh-Berman's article, "Pharmaceutical Ethics and Grassroots Activism in the United States: A Social History Perspective," was mentioned in BigThink and Mad in America.

Former intern Daisy Daeschler's article, "Is your Doctor Treating Your Social Needs?" was featured in the National Women's Health Network's newsletter, The Women's Health Activist, in August.

Photos from PharmaBait were widely used in multiple articles.

Mad in America quoted Dr. Fugh-Berman on misinformation in the marketing of expensive tardive dyskinesia drugs. "Once this type of misinformation gets into the ether, it's difficult to root it out, and prescribing doctors often rely on what they once heard from drug company reps rather than on what they read in the scholarly literature," she said.

Dr. Fugh-Berman was quoted in the Reuters article, "With Hemlibra, Roche seeks to break into tight hemophilia circle." She explained, "Industry's relationship with individual patients or health care providers is always about selling specific targeted products."

