

The new rules of medical practice

A doctor friend of mine (*D*) runs a well-known diagnostic centre. The sales executive (*SE*) of a medical publication (we'll call it *MV*) came to meet him a few weeks ago. *MV* is a tabloid, produced by a large publication house and is circulated among doctors, hospital administrators and medical companies. It is available on subscription, but is also distributed free to a large number of readers. It publishes news items pertaining to the healthcare industry, mainly related to new products, hospitals and some socio-economic issues. It is supported by a large number of advertisements.

This is a transcript of that meeting.

SE: Hello doctor.

D: Hello.

SE: I am from *MV*, published by..... Have you heard of it?

D: Yes. I somehow get it regularly, even though I don't ever remember subscribing.

SE: We send it at no cost to many doctors. What do you think of it?

D: It usually takes me about five minutes to read through the magazine. Once in a while I find something useful.

SE: What kind of information do you find useful?

D: Stuff like.....Apollo Hospital has put up a gamma knife, Siemens has introduced a new monitoring system, etc. Mainly news items. How may I help you?

SE: We are doing a special feature on diagnostic centres in Mumbai and we would like to do a write-up about you and your centre. We recently did a similar feature for centres in Hyderabad. *He hands over a copy of a recent issue, which has articles on various diagnostic centres in Hyderabad. D takes the issue and realises he has already seen it before and returns it.*

D: Thanks, but I have already gone through it some weeks back. How did you hear of us?

SE: When we asked around, many

people gave us your name. You are very well known and highly regarded among other doctors.

D feels flattered.

D: Thank you.

SE: We will be doing a two- to three-column write-up. Do you have material regarding your centre ready?

D: We are on the net. You can take relevant material from our site. We also have patient information brochures which will help you understand the work we do.

SE: I'll take them on the way out. What size advertisement would you like to give?

D: Advertisement?

SE: We offer full page, half page and quarter page ads and since this will be a special feature we will give you special discounts.

D: But why would I want to advertise?

SE: It works out to be a very good deal.

D: How much do your ads cost?

SE names some horrendous five-figure amounts.

D: I am not sure I want to advertise. Is there any other kind of information that you need for the write-up?

SE: You don't have to advertise in the same issue as the write-up. You can advertise in the next issue or the earlier one - this will give you a double-exposure.

Something finally clicks in D's head.

D: Suppose we don't advertise, will you still write about us?

SE: Please don't worry about the advertisement costs. We can work out a very beneficial deal.

D: But what if I don't want to advertise.

SE: An advertisement will help you a lot. We have a circulation of about 17,000, which includes doctors, health administrators and medical company personnel. It will increase your exposure to these people and also help you in your practice.

D: I don't think so. It doesn't work that way. Let me ask you once again. Is the write-up linked directly to our agreeing to advertise?

SE: Let me show you something. *SE removes two past issues and shows D advertisements and write-ups of other diagnostic centres in Mumbai. Many other centres have advertised in the past.*

D (with a big sigh): I will ask you one last time so please give me a straight answer. Will you do the write-up if I don't advertise?

SE: Well...actually, no. You need to take out an ad along with the write-up.

D: One more question. Does it mean that everyone you've written about earlier has had to buy ad space too?

SE: Uh....huh.

D: I would have assumed that the reason *MV* wants to write about us, is because we are good and worth writing about. If the only criterion you have for selecting centres for write-ups is their ability to advertise, then I am not so sure I am interested. You can give us a write-up if you feel it will add value to your issue, but otherwise please forget about us. We are not going to pay for a write-up.

SE: I'll have to ask my editor.

D: You do that. Thank you for your visit.

Needless to say, SE and MV never contacted D again.

I have been told by other doctors, that these kinds of situations are universal phenomena, not just restricted to Mumbai or India.

Everyone says that the healthcare industry (I wonder when the word medicine got subverted) is going through a major transition. Isn't that obvious?

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