

## Correspondence

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To the Editors:

### DTC

This has reference to the leading article on direct to consumer advertising (DTC) in June *CMJ* issue (1). Since this article mainly concerns an advertisement published by a pharmaceutical company on behalf of the non-communicable disease committee (NCD) of the SLMA, I think my comments here are appropriate.

I fully agree with the authors that the contact phone number of the company should not have appeared in this advertisement. It so happened that our attention was totally focused on the content and the accuracy of the health message rather than on a phone number, which had appeared in small print at the bottom of the advertisement. When this was brought to the notice of the pharmaceutical company they agreed to remove the phone number in future advertisements. However, I disagree with certain other matters raised in the article.

The authors attempt to define a DTC advertisement as having the following features: a) It mentions a particular condition or a disease. b) It states that a cure is available. c) It requests the patients to contact the doctor and gives the contact number of the company. To my mind, the most important of these is (b) as it is this fact which would prompt a patient to request further details about a drug.

**S Seneviratne Epa**, *Chairman, NCD committee of the SLMA.*

Let me now reproduce the relevant section of our advertisement. "Reduce foods which are high in fat or sugar and adopt an active lifestyle. You may also ask your doctor how you can stay trim and healthy. Control your weight and enjoy well-being and long life". I leave it to readers to decide if this section of the advertisement speaks of a cure being available or prompts a patient to ring up the pharmaceutical company for drug information.

The article further states that SLMA hoped that it would be a good message. We still believe that it is a good message, and in fact, we will be preparing a poster carrying the same message; of course, without the phone number of the company this time.

I feel there is a little exaggeration of facts in this article. While regretting the error on our part in not seeing the phone number, I am pleased to note that our error has given the authors an opportunity to write a leading article on a topic of public interest.

### References

1. Thalwattedegera CC, Gunathilake HMDR, Weerasuriya K. Direct to consumer advertising; the right tool in the wrong hands? *Ceylon Medical Journal* 2001; **46**: 37-9.