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# I've got a new drug

Pharmaceutical industry relies on propaganda, not product information, for sales



**JEREMY VALDEZ**  
 columnist

Getting sick used to be a pain in the head or wherever else, but a new breed of mass media prescription drug advertisements makes illness seem like something to be happy about. Unfortunately, the new ads have squeezed out some of the medical rigor. One of the best examples of this new trend is the marketing campaign for Pfizer pharmaceuticals' new drug Zyrtec. Prime-time TV viewers have probably seen this commercial where a guy is climbing a mesa and yells "ZYRTEC!" when he gets to the top.

A bold narrator says something like "This year you're going to discover something BIG. VERY BIG. If you'd like more information about how you might use prescription Zyrtec call 1-800-BIG-8989." The only problem is the commercial never says what Zyrtec is used to treat.

The saccharin recording on the toll-free number doesn't say either. Based on the mountain climbing metaphor and the constant references to "BIG", I guessed that Zyrtec was either an anti-depressant, a constipation drug or something that makes people large.

It took a trip to the Internet at [www.zyrtec.com](http://www.zyrtec.com) to find that Zyrtec is actually a prescription antihistamine. So why doesn't the commercial say what the drug is for?

At best, it's a fumble on the part of the advertising agency; the ad writers may have simply forgot to include a vital piece of information. However, considering the enormous amounts of money and attention that get poured into a national prime-time commercial, it's more likely the omission was a calculated maneuver.

Perhaps the advertisers thought that viewers who don't usually take prescription antihistamines would mentally disregard the commercial if they were told of the drug's purpose.

With its teasing strategy Pfizer stands to sell more Zyrtec to garden variety psychodriacs who want to try the latest drug, regardless of what it treats, and grab the names of thousands of potential customers for a mailing list.

And the next time one of those thousands gets a sniffle that might respond just fine to some non-prescription pill or even chicken soup, he or she will have a slick color brochure and maybe a pen or some sticky notes with the Zyrtec logo to remind which drug is best, er... best promoted.

Dr. Norma Porres, a physician at A.P. Beutel Health Center, said that Zyrtec is a very good antihistamine, but that prescription drug advertisements are part of an attempt to usurp the responsibilities that doctors have traditionally held in advocating new medicines.

Just a few years ago, pharmaceutical companies would give untold millions of dollars worth of drug samples to doctors for free distribution. Porres said that the free samples were of great benefit to elderly patients and others on fixed incomes.

But drug development costs continue to soar, and pharmaceutical companies produce hundreds of new competing drugs each year. So drug companies have found a way to increase revenues by giving away less product in doctors' offices and taking their brand names straight to the public in the form of advertisements.

In a world where Zyrtec, Allegra and Claritin compete for the same Kleenex-toting, phlegm-wheezing masses, it's every lab for itself, and the gloves have come off. The drug companies are getting greedy.

And in a capitalistic society, that's wonderful. If it wasn't for greedy drug manufacturers, there would be no new medicines and the standard treatment for hypertension would still involve leeches.

But too many drug companies are crossing the line with advertisements that create confusion and base curiosity in the general public. Furthermore, ridiculous commercials like the one for Zyrtec seem to be saying "Hey! We've got a new drug and maybe you're lucky enough to have the right disease!"

Last month's U. Magazine had an ad for Tri-Cycline, an Ortho Pharmaceuticals drug that has been proven to fight acne. Since it's a birth control pill, it also prevents ovulation.

Tri-Cycline can help make you more attractive, and its contraceptive side effects will protect you from the consequences of your increased social interaction!

Commercial fluff shouldn't attempt to substitute for a good doctor's opinion, but the ads often produce unnecessary pressure on doctors to prescribe one drug over another.

"Patients come in and ask for a drug," Porres said. "And, where it isn't contraindicated, we try to please." She has already had one confused patient ask for a Zyrtec prescription to treat his depression.

So should the same government that killed Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man work to further regulate the advertising of prescription drugs? No. Such regulation would probably be ineffective and would

only fuel unproductive arguments over the sanctity of the First Amendment.

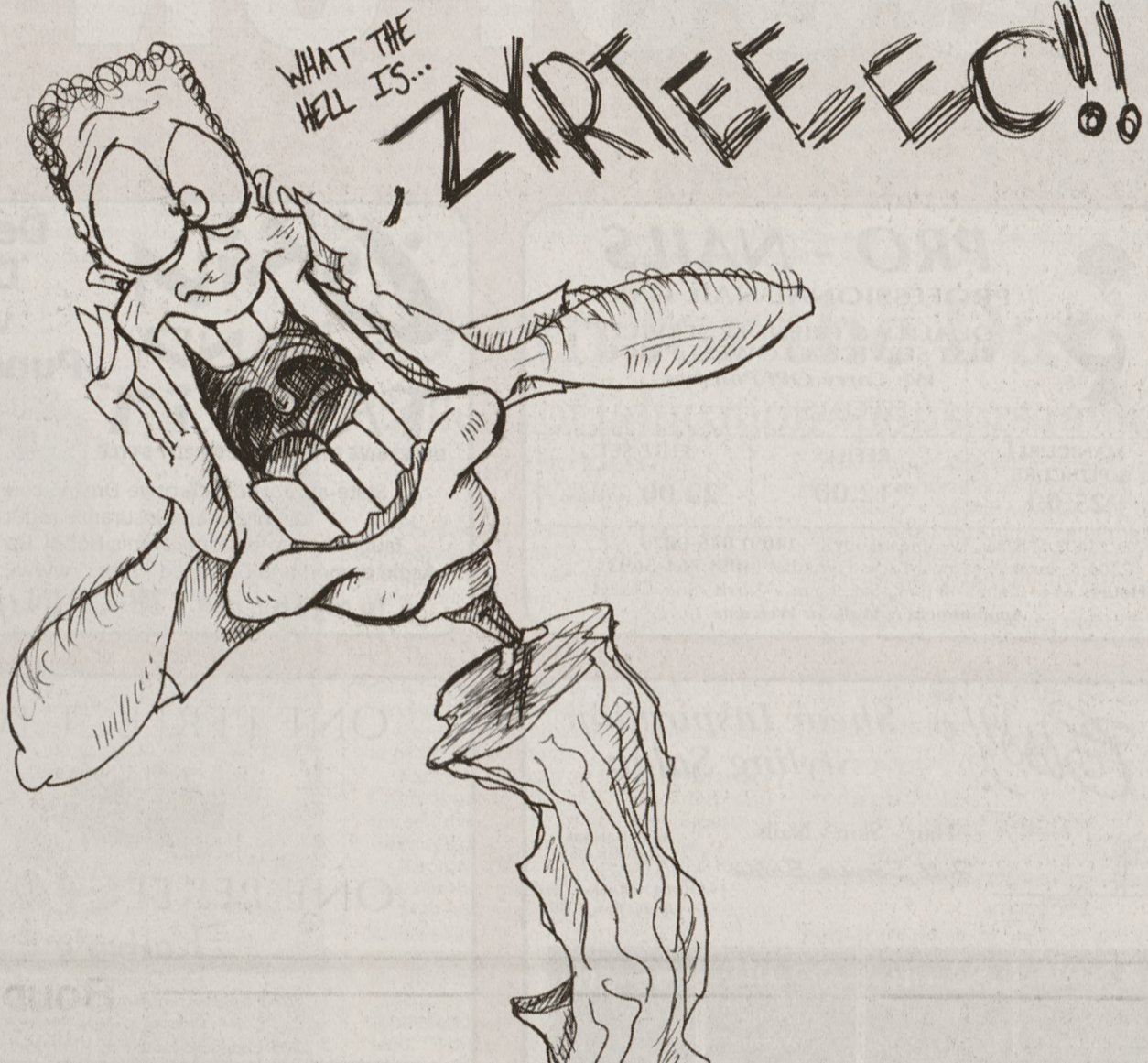
The best answer is a return to good, old fashioned shame. Shame on Pfizer for advertising a drug without saying what it's for. Shame on Ortho for trying to push a contraceptive as an acne drug.

Until American consumers demand that drug commercials convey more information than propaganda, we'll be subject-

ed to ads that not only insult our intelligence, but trivialize our health.

It's enough to keep you up at night. But don't worry too much, because it's only a matter of time before Madison Avenue starts pimping Benadryl as a sleep aid.

Jeremy Valdez is a senior chemical engineering major.



# Environmental extremists rely on scare tactics and junk science



**DONNY FERGUSON**  
 columnist

The Earth will fry because our ozone layer is disappearing! Polluted water turns people into criminals! Species are going extinct left and right! Doomsday scientists are back in the news and the newest ecological crisis is the most ridiculous yet.

The Institute for Climate Impact Research in Potsdam, Germany has concluded Northern Europe will suddenly freeze, because of global warming.

According to research performed by a group of European environmentalists, the broiling temperatures which may occur due to greenhouse gases will result in a "sudden freeze" of Northern Europe. In keeping with contemporary environmentalism, scientists are urging governments to pass massive new legislation and send them millions of dollars as soon as possible. Scientists want world leaders to act without giving any thought as to whether the group is right because if they delay, the Earth may suddenly be destroyed.

Our planet is under assault and the time has come to save the Earth from — environmental lunacy.

When asked just how serious the "heat-induced freezing" problem is, the German group's Stefan Rahmstorf said, "...we cannot calculate that risk." In other words, "I dunno." "I can promise that in 10 years we will know a lot more about it," Rahmstorf concluded. Again, he means, "We're just guessing here, but send us money anyway in the unlikely event we're right." The Institute should focus its attention on late-night infomercial suckers. The we're-going-to-freeze-because-of-heat movement is typical of every environmentalist scare campaign preceding it. Environmental extremists start with a theory, either create evidence or distort fact, scare people into believing them and urge lawmakers to pass the legislation they want.

Environmentalists have spent the past two decades bludgeoning the public into believing "the Earth is fragile" and the only way to save mankind from imminent destruction is to fight technology and capitalism. These apocalyptic statements are often based on junk science or outright assumptions, usually to either influence lawmakers or rake in more grant money. Two recent studies in particular show environmental extremism for what it is, a flimsy, pseudo-science quickly going the way of the dodo — to extinction.

The currently popular ozone hole hysteria and its "Northern European freeze" offspring are classic cases in environmentalism's junk science birth and mass hysteria effects. The Earth's ozone hole was first identified in the early 1990s, decades before the production of chlorofluorocarbons. Anyone bold enough to question how a heavy, sinking gas which quickly drops to the ground can affect a four billion year old ozone layer miles in the stratosphere is shouted down as an unfeeling eco-villain. Even more interesting is the fact that minor volcanic eruptions emit thousands of times the amount of CFCs mankind had ever produced. The Mount Pinatubo eruption in the Philippines did just that, the result was a possible, minor fluctuation in ozone levels, but no permanent damage occurred. After four billion years of cataclysmic volcanic eruptions, which have dumped more CFCs into our atmosphere than mankind will ever release, our ozone level still holds.

Researchers at Tulane University are not faring much better than their CFC-banning comrades. The university recently retracted a June 1996 study claiming a "synergy effect" among ordinary pesticides, which supposedly causes mutations and boosts estrogen levels. The report received national attention as it influenced state and federal legislation and sent environmentalists into a more frantic panic than usual.

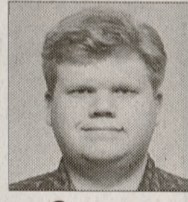
The apocalyptic study claims male alligators in a Florida lake exposed to pesticides suffer withered reproductive organs and estrogen levels equal to female alligators. A senior Tulane researcher has humbly withdrawn the study, as results could not be reproduced in other experiments.

Junk science like this has become a trademark of the environmentalist fringe. They attempt to terrify those who cannot be influenced by common-sense conservation groups like Ducks Unlimited with Chicken Little claims of certain destruction. Embarrassments like the alar pesticide scare, the "population bomb," global cooling supposedly caused by global warming and other foul-ups are relegating environmental extremists to the endangered list.

Our fantastic planet and mankind's way of life are indeed in danger. Not by CFCs, automobiles or Styrofoam coolers, but by a horde of ecological terrorists who seek to pervert American life through junk science.

Donny Ferguson is a junior political science major.

# America On Line subject to same laws as other forums



**STEPHEN LLANO**  
 columnist

Ask the average independent netizen, or net-citizen, their opinion of America On Line, the mega-corporate Internet service provider, and usually some sort of violent response of disgust will be immediate.

America On Line, however cheesy or mainstream it has become to the regulars on-line, has provided society with the one thing it needs to properly deal with the Internet: A very public forum.

Throughout history, Americans have relied on public forums as the standard methodology to work through issues that confront everyone.

The newspapers carried the debate on ratification of the Constitution, the radio carried President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's weekly messages to people hard hit in the Great Depression and television brought the war in Vietnam from the eastern hemisphere to the living room.

Of course, no such monumental event has been carried by the still young Internet. At best, the Internet is in toddler phase, possibly entering what many parents refer to as "the terrible twos."

Yes, the Internet is finally getting the gumption to challenge some of the rules that have been left undefined in the flurry of electronic haste and excitement.

America On Line has been the unlucky pioneer of defining what unlimited access means, as well as forcing local phone companies to deal with an increase in additional phone lines reserved for the newest resident, the computer.

America On Line's national advertising campaigns, ease of use,

pretty colors and graphics and spoon-fed Internet access have allowed the same people with a VCR continually flashing the time as noon to surf right along side the superuser.

This large clientele also comes with a large amount of attention, as Internet gossip columnist Matt Drudge recently discovered.

Currently, Drudge is in the middle of a \$30 million lawsuit for defamation due to a column claiming, "New White House recruit Sidney Blumenthal has a spousal abuse past that has been effectively covered up."

The allegation was completely untrue, and the libel suit was quick in coming even though Drudge pulled the column 24

**America On Line has been the unlucky pioneer of defining what unlimited access means...**

hours after it ran and apologized.

If this was a newspaper, it would be a cut and dried case. The concept of being able to pull a libelous writing right off of the means of publication is pretty much science fiction in the context of current print libel laws.

But the question remains: What is America On Line?

As a service provider to Internet access, the company basically takes users to a certain information destination.

Logically, much like an airline, they would be held responsible if something went wrong during transit, but passengers are on their own when they reach the destination.

As for dangerous destinations, the Federal Aviation Administration regulates which airlines and airports are viable for U.S. citizens to use or select as a destination.

But for netziens, the Supreme

Court's striking down of the Communications Decency Act has set the awesome precedent of regulatory protection.

But this law really applies to the Internet as a whole, and America On Line also provides in-house prepared content for subscribers. This is getting foggy.

According to a report in the Washington Post, Blumenthal believes that America On Line is a publisher in this respect, and should be handled as such.

As far as information that America On Line produces exclusively for members, it is acting in the capacity as a publisher.

It is irrelevant whether said content appears in physical print or not. If it is accessible to readers, it doesn't matter if it can be magically wiped out or not.

People are going to have to drop the mythical status associated with the Internet. As more people sign on and discover the ease of up-to-the-minute news and information on every subject imaginable, the seriousness of accuracy has to come to light.

Just as in the past, the transition from town crier or local pub for news to print as the literacy rate increased, the computer literacy rate will spur people to demand stricter interpretations of libel and defamation with regard to electronic media.

This case has yet to be decided within the court. In the minds of many, America On Line has already been judged as the vehicle of the masses, not to be considered by the serious computer user as a valid means to access the Internet.

But as more people are introduced to the Internet, and embrace it as a primary source of information, there can be no choice for the courts than to demand revision in our outdated, print view of defamation.

Stephen Llano is a senior history major.