



the PRUDENT prescriber

Phil Mohler, M.D.

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Time to Say Goodbye

“Where shall I begin your majesty?”

“Yes, begin at the beginning,” the king said gravely, “and go until you come to the end; then stop.”

-Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

The Prudent Prescriber began in 1998 as an in-office, succinctly titled, *“Family Physicians of Western Colorado Pharmacology Literacy Foundation.”* That April 1998 edition featured an article on the joys of recently marketed Viagra. (Sex Sells Newsletters) It warned against writing prescriptions for drugs that begin with the letter “Z.”

“No one should approach the temple of science with the heart of a moneychanger.”
Sir Thomas Brown

Over the last twenty-six years and over 300 editions later, the mission statement remained the same:

Provide practical, unbiased, accurate pharmaceutical prescribing information for primary care clinicians working in the trenches. There has been a consistent focus on pharmaco-economics.

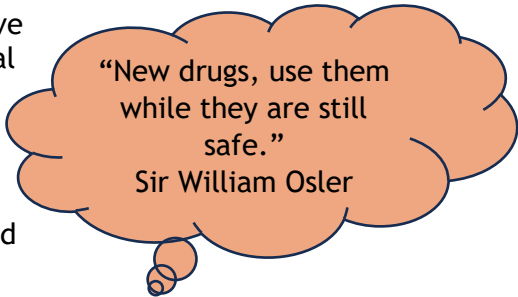
Over this last quarter of the century some issues in the prescribing world have not changed:

- Big Pharma’s unending greed.
- The persistence of Direct to Consumer Advertising for drugs in the USA.
- Big Pharma remains ensconced with its perpetually impotent FDA bed partner.
- Pharma’s legal wrangling to prolong the trademark status of their aging drugs.
- The ongoing marketing and prescribing of drugs with little, if any efficacy: Tamiflu, Myrbetriq and all the old and new overwhelmingly worthless products marketed for dementia.

“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”
Carl Sagan

During that same 26 years, some positive developments made prescribing easier:

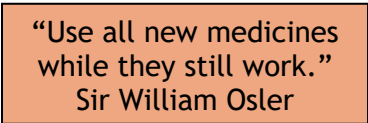
- Choosing Wisely, the American Board of Internal Medicine’s initiative to encourage clinicians and patients to think and talk about medical tests and drugs that might be unnecessary. (2012-2023)
- GoodRx
- ePocrates
- The No Free Lunch movement that championed “Just Say No to Drug Reps.” I still cherish my “No Free Lunch” coffee mug and tattered t-shirt.
- The Affordable Care Act
- Canadian drugs and particularly the user-friendly website, www.pharmacychecker.com.
- The Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER) is an independent nonprofit research institute that produces reports analyzing the evidence on the effectiveness and value of drugs.
- Over the counter status for naloxone, nasal steroids, emergency contraception and coming soon to a pharmacy near you, Opill, the first OTC oral contraceptive.
- Katelyn Jetelina’s Your Local Epidemiologist (YLE) is an insightful look into public health decision making.
- The miraculous development and deployment of Covid vaccines.



“Writing prescriptions is easy, but understanding people is hard.” Franz Kafka

What are the pharma principles that I hope you have taken home from reading the Prudent Prescriber?

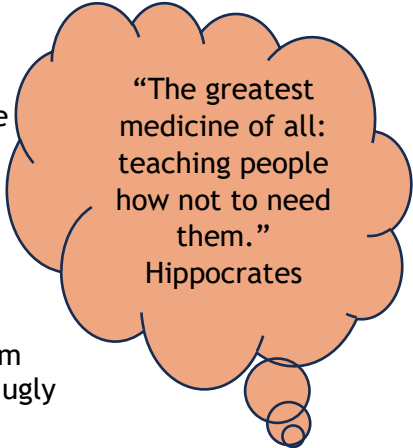
- Think, eat, breathe, sleep Number Needed to Treat (NNT). **Do not let anyone ever talk to you about relative risk reduction again.**
- How to read a study:
 1. Look at the Methods section first to see if the article is worthy of your time. If the methods are faulty, all is lost.
 2. Are there conflicts of interest? Who paid for the study?
 3. How big is “N”? Is the study blinded? What was the duration of the study?
 4. Are the patients in the study you are reading similar to your patient?
 5. Often there’s a world of difference between what’s statistically significant and clinically relevant.
- I always had great facility in writing new prescriptions. I was lousy at stopping medicines. Consider at every opportunity, “Does the patient really need all her prescribed medicines?”
- And always remember, “You physician are the most potent drug available.” Michael Balint’s 1957 book, “The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness” remains an important treatise on how we prescribe ourselves and how we tender our prescriptions. Use your persuasive power to maximize the placebo effect of every drug you prescribe.



Thank You

Whatever success the Prudent Prescriber has enjoyed is in large part due to a huge cast of people who have supported me.

My gratitude goes to my medical practice partners (and particularly, Dr. Roger Shenkel) who in 1998 supported the creation of this newsletter. Pharmacists Nan Emerson, Steve Nolan, Zach Kareus, Heather Carwin, and Brittany Beeler saved me more than once from decimal point disasters and upside-down statements. Rocky Mountain Health Plans/UHC medical directors Bruce, Dave, Kevin, and Kim were consistent in their support of this endeavor. Those of you who perused the ugly



formatting and wonky fonts of the early newsletters know how much I appreciate the expertise of Chelsea and her predecessors.

Along the way, Rocky Mountain Health Plans and subsequently United Healthcare provided financial support, but never in a quarter of a century over-rode me editorially or influenced the content of this newsletter. They stood with me when Big Pharma threatened on one occasion. That's remarkable!

And last, but really first, thank you dear readers for sticking with me in spite of fifth grade bathroom humor, and my insatiable snarky criticism of Big Pharma and the FDA. Your enduring feedback and constructive criticism make the newsletter better. I am particularly grateful to my wife Nancy, Dr. Larry Anderson of Wellington, Kansas, RN Terri Ahern, Queen of CME, and my son, Dr. Andy Mohler for their vociferous support of the Prudent Prescriber.

“If all the drugs were thrown into the ocean, it would be all the worse for the fishes, and all the better for mankind.”

Oliver Wendel Holmes

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Prudent Prescriber
Authored by Phil Mohler, MD



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