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## As drug ads surge, more get Rx's filled

By Julie Appleby, USA TODAY

Prescription-drug ads prompt nearly one-third of Americans to ask their doctors about an advertised medicine, and 82% of those who ask say their physicians recommended a prescription.

The findings in a national survey by USA TODAY, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health come as drug advertising hit a record \$4.8 billion in 2006, up from \$2.6 billion in 2002.

**ANALYSIS:** Public debates whose needs are being met with drug ads

"Our survey shows why the drug companies run all these ads: They work," says Drew Altman, president of the Kaiser Foundation. "Many people get drugs they otherwise wouldn't. While there's a debate about whether that's a good thing for patients, it does cost the country more."

Among people who requested a drug, 44% said physicians gave the one they asked about, while slightly more than half said doctors prescribed a different drug. Sometimes, doctors did both. When duplicate answers were removed, the poll found 82% of patients got some type of prescription.

**YOUR STORY:** Have you ever asked your doctor for a drug you saw advertised?

The percentage of people getting a drug after asking about an ad shows an uptick from 2005, when Kaiser found that 75% said the doctors recommended some type of drug. The USA began allowing drug ads in 1997.

The survey of 1,695 adults was taken in January and has a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points. Americans are nearly evenly divided in their views of the industry: 47% have a favorable impression, and 44% have an unfavorable view, frequently citing high prices, large profits or company greed as the reason.

Billy Tauzin, president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, the industry's lobbying group, says many of those surveyed were likely reacting to increasing co-payments from insurers rather than escalating drug prices. Drug costs rose an average of 3.5% in 2006 over 2005, government data show.

The poll also found that cost pressures have led 29% of Americans not to fill a prescription in the past two years and 23% to cut pills in half or skip doses to make their medications last longer. Buying drugs is sometimes a problem for 41% of families because of cost.

**READERS:** Have you ever asked your doctor for drugs you've seen advertised on TV, online or in print? If so, did your doctor prescribe the drug?

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