
EDITORIAL

My Morning Commute and the Impact of Urology

For many who drive to work, the average commute time in the US is nearly 30 minutes. My drive time is a little further outside of the city ranging about 40 minutes, giving me plenty of radio listening time. I bounce between satellite talk radio and musical choices, mostly to avoid the prolonged and seemingly growing lengths of commercials. Lately, however, more and more radio ads have gotten my attention. I have been impressed by the number of radio ads that seem to focus on urology centric conditions and their associated pharmaceutical products. You usually do not hear about plaque psoriasis or ulcerative colitis or the latest injectable for weight loss on the radio. Perhaps these medical conditions require more visual impact provided by TV advertisements. What are these urology advertisements with many of them ending with the FDA “This product is not meant to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease?” Here is an overview of some of these advertisements that often air as a triple play in back-to-back commercials on my morning commute.

Kidney stones, specifically calcium oxalate, and yes, they are very specific kidney stones, can be prevented by a product that has another name for a policeman. Then there is a special price for a blue pill to help you “score”. The special pricing of \$5 a pill was to mark a milestone in the sale and distribution of this specific and pioneering erectile dysfunction medication. If you want to avoid those “uncomfortable face to face discussions” with a physician about your problems in the bedroom, you can get this and other ED medications by sharing your story remotely with online medical evaluation from any number of men’s health companies.

Then there is the radio offer to log into a web site and learn all about all the “shocking” information being withheld from the public concerning drugs to treat benign prostate enlargement. In the world of urogynecology, dyspareunia or painful intercourse is never mentioned but female “intimacy” is the code word used repeatedly for this products advertising. And yes, the leading malignancy in men, prostate cancer, also gets a nod. Not directly for the disease or treatment but in a commercial discussing a gentleman with prostate cancer who needed discount life insurance. One day, this made it a four in a row urology advertising sweep.

Many urologic conditions start in midlife, after age 50, and increase with age. Today, the baby boomer generation comprises most of these individuals. It seems that the boomers have made it more acceptable to talk about these urological centric issues. Erectile dysfunction and female “intimacy” were once considered taboo to discuss publicly, and modern pharmaceutical marketing has gotten the message that it is acceptable to discuss these on the airwaves. So far, the infamous “gotta-go, gotta-go” mantra on TV ads promoting overactive bladder medications has not yet made it to these radio stations that appear to target the boomers. These overactive bladder meds will likely make it on the satellite radio hit list one day soon.

Beyond these fairly common urologic conditions with medications that are being aggressively marketed for older adults, Urologists are in demand for many other reasons. There were many covid pandemic related retirements, the urology work force is ageing (30% of urologists are over 65, and 50% are over 55), and as noted, there has been significant expansion of the baby boomer populations requiring more urologic care. The American Urological Association has recognized there is a growing shortage of urologists in the US.¹ BPH, stones, sexual dysfunction in men and women are hot advertising topics on my morning commute and this reinforces to me the critical role and a growing need for urologic care.

When I am bored, I sometimes switch stations and listen to a well-known shock jock who, with great fanfare, left terrestrial radio and joined satellite radio years ago. Hard to believe, but he himself is a member of the baby boom generation. He freely discusses his nagging prostate issues and lately, ED drugs are getting more mention in his broadcasts.

Advertisers are skilled at identifying and focusing on the demographics of their target audience. Maybe my choice of radio stations and keying in on these urologic promotional ads simply reflects me not only being a urologist but also being part of the baby boomer generation.

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References

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