

# Media publicity best for drug warnings

February 13 2006

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A Bristol University study shows media coverage concerning a drug's adverse reactions is much more effective than official regulatory announcements.

The number of adverse reactions reported by British physicians to the antidepressant Seroxat (paroxetine) rose 61 percent after coverage of the drug's effects in three BBC "Panorama" current affairs programs, but only 5 percent after official regulatory announcements.

The researchers found a sudden increase in reports immediately after each of the three programs aired in Britain during October 2002, May 2003 and October 2004.

Five regulatory announcements issued during the same period resulted in a much smaller 5 percent increase in reports of adverse reactions.

The initial Panorama program followed two announcements by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The first announcement, in January 2002, warned of severe withdrawal symptoms from paroxetine and the second, in October 2002, suggested links between the drug and suicidal behavior.

Panorama, first broadcast in 1953, is the longest-running public affairs TV program in the world. The program won a Mental Health Media Award in 2003 for its first two investigations into the safety of paroxetine.

The research appears in the latest issue of the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology.

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Citation: Media publicity best for drug warnings (2006, February 13) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-02-media-drug.html>

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