

# AFP Editors' Advertorial Principles, Policies, and Procedures

*American Family Physician* endorses the AMA's definition of "advertorial" and the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) editorial guidelines for advertorials:

- From the AMA Manual of Style:  
"An advertorial is an ad that imitates editorial content or presents content in an editorial-like format." (1). [See below for characteristics of "editorial-like format."]
- From the ASME Editorial Guidelines:  
"Regardless of platform or format, the difference between editorial content and marketing messages should be clear to the average reader. Advertisements that mimic the look and feel of the print or digital publication in which they appear may deceive readers and should be avoided." (2,3)
- Adapted from the AMA Manual of Style's Guidelines for Display of Advertorials:
  - Should be clearly labeled as "Advertisement"
  - Have a different format from the journal's editorial content
  - Include a prominent display of the company name and/or logo so that readers can quickly ascertain that the information is an advertisement and is not part of the journal's editorial content.

With these principles in mind, *AFP* has adopted the following policies and procedures regarding advertorials:

## Process

The editor-in-chief (or EIC medical editor designee) will review advertorials, or any advertisement that might appear to be an advertorial, to ensure compliance with these principles. Gray areas or questions will be resolved by the EIC, who will discuss the situation with the Director of Journal Media as needed. If a submitted advertisement is judged to be an advertorial by the EIC, after review and recommendation by the designated review editor, it will need to adhere to *AFP*'s policies and procedures for advertorials.

## Content

To ensure that the content is not egregiously misleading, *AFP* medical editors will briefly review advertorials for suitability, similar to the process for reviewing advertising for non-FDA-approved nutritional supplements and so-called nutraceuticals (4). Analogous to our policy on nutritional supplements, "The presentation must not be so unbalanced as to be judged unacceptably misleading." The intent of this policy is not to micromanage or edit the content of every advertorial, but rather to provide the EIC the option of rejecting an advertorial whose content was judged to be unacceptably misleading.

## Format

1. The word "ADVERTISEMENT" must be included at the top of each page in 14-point bold font.
  2. The company logo must appear prominently on the first page or opening spread, to help identify the content for readers as coming from an advertiser.
  3. The advertorial must not refer to itself as an "article" because that may give readers the impression that this is a scholarly article rather than a marketing message.
  4. The format of the advertorial cannot appear similar to the format of other *AFP* articles or departments (i.e., layout, color scheme, formatting of tables and figures, etc.). The EIC may ask the executive editor for their opinion regarding any similarities in appearance between the advertorial and *AFP* content.
  5. Advertorials should not appear within articles or departments, but instead between them. In cases where there's really no other place to put the advertorial, *AFP's* production graphics manager will use a different color from the *AFP* palette for the department, even though that's not our usual practice. In a worse-case scenario where neither of these options will work to everyone's visual satisfaction, the production director will seek permission from the director of journal media to add extra pages to the journal to move the advertorial to a different location, which will be freely agreed to once it appears that there's no other way to resolve this issue.
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## Appendix

### Characteristics of an "editorial-like format" (advertorial)

The following characteristics are examples of "editorial-like formatting" that constitutes an advertisement as an "advertorial." This list is not all-inclusive, and the final determination of what constitutes an advertorial (and is therefore subject to the policies and procedures outlined in this document) rests with the EIC.

1. Provides background or "educational" content and context, beyond that found in FDA-approved product labeling for the advertiser's product. The content might not even mention the advertiser's product, (e.g., "disease promotion").
2. Is formatted like an article, with columns of text in article-size font, with headings outlining various aspects of the topic being discussed.
3. Has tables and figures not directly outlining characteristics of the advertiser's product, and includes boxed "key points."

4. Has an author byline, especially a physician author.
5. Has a detailed reference bibliography, appearing at the end of the piece, and resembling the layout of a standard reference bibliography of journal articles, rather than a few footnote citations (which are often shortened versions of standard journal citations, for example: Smith JA. NEJM 2018(4)56-65.).

### **Characteristics of traditional (non-advertorial) advertising**

On the other hand, the following characteristics are found in non-advertorial advertisements. The more of these there are, the more the piece does not need to be treated as an advertorial.

1. The content mainly discusses information found in FDA-approved product labeling and focuses on the drug or medical device being advertised, rather than discussing generic disease pathophysiology, clinical importance, management, or such.
2. Tables and figures relate to the advertiser's product characteristics, rather than a disease or subject under discussion, similar to traditional ads from pharmaceutical companies.
3. Includes illustrations of the advertiser's product.
4. Contains the official FDA product information (short or long format), often in smaller font at the end or along the bottom of the piece.

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### References

AMA Manual of Style on advertorials

1. <https://www.amamanualofstyle.com/view/10.1093/jama/9780195176339.001.0001/med-9780195176339-div2-226>

ASME guidelines on editorial policy, including advertorials

2. <https://asme.media/editorial-guidelines>
3. [https://asme.media/assets/docs/New%20ASME%20Guidelines%20FAQ\\_0.pdf](https://asme.media/assets/docs/New%20ASME%20Guidelines%20FAQ_0.pdf)

AFP policy on ads for supplements

4. <https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/journals/afp/AFP-Policy-Nutritional-Supplements.pdf>