UNIQUE HISTORY CENTER HIGHLIGHTS
SPECIALTY-INDUSTRY CONNECTION

by Michael Devitt

The Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote that history “is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life, and brings us tidings of antiquity.”

The remarkable history and evolution of the modern pharmaceutical industry in America certainly bears witness to the truth of Cicero’s statement. One place where people can learn more about one of the more unique aspects of American pharma history is at the Center for the History of Family Medicine (CHFM) in Leawood, Kansas. The CHFM was founded in 1992, and is located at the headquarters of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), the national association of family doctors, with more than 105,900 members nationwide. Administered by the non-profit AAFP Foundation, the CHFM’s mission is to tell the story of family medicine using personal artifacts, professional collections, and other material gleaned from individual family physicians and the nation’s leading family medicine organizations. The Center also creates online exhibits and provides information about family medicine on its website.

What makes the Center unique from other medical archives is that it is the only historical repository created and dedicated solely to preserving and sharing the history of family medicine in the United States. Each year, family medicine organizations, physicians, students, researchers and members of the general public contact the Center with questions about family medicine and related topics— including pharmaceuticals.

One of the most prominent features of the Center is its collection of print publications. The Center contains bound copies of every issue of the AAFP’s flagship journals, including GP (the AAFP’s first publication), American Family Physician (AFP), and Family Practice Management (FPM), from the first issue of GP published in April 1950 to the present day.

Browsing through these journals provides a fascinating window on the past. By comparing back issues of GP, AFP and FPM, individuals can catch a glimpse not only of the major issues facing family physicians in the second half of the twentieth century, but also of the different vendors and agencies that have advertised their products and services. In particular, reviewing back issues helps to reveal how medical advertising has changed over the years. Nowhere is this more evident than in pharmaceutical advertising,
which has seen significant changes in style, messaging, the delivery of information, and other elements that go into the creation of an effective print display ad.

The following pages contain advertisements selected at random from the archives of GP and American Family Physician, ranging from the debut issue of GP through to the January 1, 2012 issue of AFP. Some of them are remarkably similar to the drug advertisements that appear in other recent publications.

Robitussin. Robitussin DAC is a Schedule V drug used to treat acute coughs and nasal congestion. This ad from the October 1985 edition of American Family Physician makes effective use of the New York skyline to display its distinctive “DAC” formula (advertised as decongestant and codeine). (Reprinted with permission from Pfizer, Inc. 2012)
Mayonnaise. Not all of the advertisements in American Family Physician are for pharmaceuticals. Some, like this November 1974 ad touting the benefits of mayonnaise, are geared toward changes in diet and nutrition. (Reproduced with kind permission of Unilever PLC and group companies)

Collections of medical journals featuring pharmaceutical and other advertising are just one component of what the Center for the History of Family Medicine has to offer. For more information on the Center, or to learn more about the practice of family medicine and how it has helped shape the direction of health care in the United States over the last half-century, visit the Center’s website at http://www.aafpfoundation.org/chfm or call (800) 274-2237, ext. 4420 or 4422.