

Wonkblog

Big pharmaceutical companies are spending far more on marketing than research

By **Ana Swanson** February 11, 2015

Prescription drugs are a massive market: Americans spent \$329.2 billion on prescription drugs in 2013. That works out to about \$1,000 per person in the U.S., as John Oliver [pointed out](#) in his show on Sunday night.

Oliver also mentioned that nine out of 10 big pharmaceutical companies spend more on marketing than on research. [León Markovitz](#) of Dadaviz found and graphed those figures from healthcare research firm [GlobalData](#) in the [graphic](#) below. The amounts spent on sales and marketing are shown in orange, while the amounts spent on research and development are in blue.

The biggest spender, Johnson & Johnson, shelled out \$17.5 billion on sales and marketing in 2013, compared with \$8.2 billion for R&D. In the top 10, only Roche spent more on R&D than on sales and marketing.

Most of this marketing money is directed at the physicians who do the prescribing, rather than consumers. As Oliver pointed out, drug companies spent more than \$3 billion a year marketing to consumers in the U.S. in 2012, but an estimated [\\$24 billion](#) marketing directly to health care professionals.


Oliver closed his segment with a hilarious spoof commercial that urges patients to ask their doctors how pharmaceutical marketing might be influencing them.

"Ask your doctor today if he's taking pharmaceutical company money. Then ask your doctor what the money is for," the narrator says. "Ask your doctor if he's taken any money from the companies who make the drugs he just prescribed for you. Then ask yourself if you're satisfied with that answer."

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