

Boosting the brand image

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While deceptive food advertisements are common in India,^[1] we present the case of use of nutritional brand name of one company to prop up the medicine brand of another company.

M/s Centaur Pharmaceuticals Pvt Ltd manufactures a brand of Vitamin D3 by the name “Dboost” for which it claims to have trademark. It has listed its Dboost in the cardio-diabetic range of products^[2] and its homepage shows a picture that claims “Centaur’s USFDA plant,”^[3] whatever these claims mean! Its product, Dboost, in soft gelatin capsule form was gifted as medicine sample to the prescribers [Figure 1].

It claims, “82% Indians are Vit D deficient,” and quotes an incomplete reference, Arch Osteoporos (2012) 7: 187-192, for this statement. With all the sunshine being available in plenty in India, it is surprising how 82% Indians are Vit D deficient.

The inside of this cover contains three glued contents on the same pack. One 15 g sachet of Boost manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline group of companies, which mentions that Boost is a trademark of the company, and the other two packets are of DBoost Vitamin D3 capsules 60,000 IU containing one capsule each with the trademark symbol, manufactured by Softech Pharma Pvt Ltd, Nani Daman and marketed by Centaur Pharmaceuticals Pvt Ltd, Mumbai [Figure 2].

Thus, the contents of the promotional pack indicate that the pharmaceutical company has used the sample of another

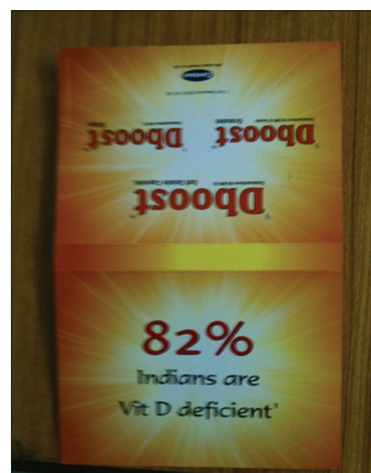


Figure 1: External side of the promotional pack



Figure 2: Internal contents of the promotional pack

nutritional product to prop up its brand. It claims to have a trademark for its brand (Dboost) and yet has used the trademarked product of another company (Boost) to support its own brand. This is a case of sound-alike brands in which one is a pharmaceutical product and another is a nutritional one.

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We enquired Centaur and GSKCHL if the permission of GSKCHL was sought for the use of Boost sachet along with Dboost tablets. While GSKCHL did accept that they had supplied the Boost sachets against payment to Centaur, no categorical reply was received about GSKCHL offering permission to Centaur for the promotional use of Dboost.

While the tab Dboost was manufactured in September 2013, with the expiry date of August 2015, the sachet of Boost accompanying it was manufactured in August 2013 and mentions “best before 12 months from packaging” which means that from July 2014, it will not be the best! While one is to be sold over the counter, the other contains the warning “To be sold by retail on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner only.” What a wonderful combination of two products distributed free together!

We are not commenting about the clinical usefulness of vitamin D since there are conflicting reports about its utility.^[4] However, our concern is surely about the promotional gimmickry that has been practiced in this case. We feel that the

advertisers need to be cautious before adopting such practices of equating medicines with nutritional products and candies.

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