

December 5, 2007

ADVERTISING

A Heart Stent Maker Decides the Way to the Patient Is Through the Patient

By [BARNABY J. FEDER](#)

FOOTBALL fans who tuned in to watch the Dallas Cowboys crush the New York Jets on Thanksgiving Day saw at least one novel play: the first attempt by a medical device maker to market a heart [stent](#) directly to consumers.

Those who missed it will have more than 175 opportunities to see the 60-second spot, titled "Life Wide Open," during other games and on cable news programs before the end of the year, according to Carol Goodrich, a spokeswoman for the Cordis Corporation, the [Johnson & Johnson](#) subsidiary behind the campaign.

The campaign also includes print advertising in national newspapers and magazines and a separate effort to promote the stent, the Cypher, to doctors in professional journals. Cordis has also set up a Web site, www.cypherusa.com, as an online marketing destination and information clearinghouse for patients and doctors.

Cordis declined to disclose planned spending on the campaign or to allow BBDO, the agency of the [Omnicom Group](#) that developed the consumer elements of it, to discuss its work for the company. But Cordis is looking to address both widespread concerns about stent safety and future competition in the multibillion-dollar market for the devices.

"We think we have a good safety story to tell, and we want to encourage heart patients to talk about it with their doctors," said Dr. David E. Kandzari, chief medical officer at Cordis. "And we want them to know Cypher's track record when newer, less proven [stents](#) reach the market."

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The Cypher television spot might be mystifyingly vague to viewers who have never heard of stents, which are implanted in blood vessels to prop them open after blockages have been cleared. Cypher was designed for the vital network of arteries that keep the heart nourished with oxygen. The aim in using it is lasting relief from chest pains and [shortness of breath](#), the

symptoms of clogged coronary arteries known as [angina](#).

A Cypher stent flashes across the screen during the spot, but there is no indication of its actual size or how it is implanted. Instead, Cordis strikes two themes: Cypher relieves pain and other angina symptoms (so talk to your doctor about it) and, when it comes to coronary stents, Cypher is the most studied and widely used.

Not surprisingly, the campaign has stirred criticism among doctors who oppose direct-to-consumer advertising of drugs and devices, and especially among doctors who contend that stents are being implanted too often in patients who might do better with other treatments.

“It’s deplorable,” said Dr. William E. Boden, a professor of medicine at the State University of New York at Buffalo. “You’ve got to wonder whether it’s a sign of desperation.”

In fairness, the stent story is not easy to tell fully in 60 minutes, much less 60 seconds or a single-page print ad.

Cypher has been sold in the United States since 2003. Despite a bungled introduction that infuriated many doctors who could not get their hands on the device, Cypher was an immediate hit because it was the first product in the market with a crucial new feature: a polymer coating impregnated with a drug that seeps into the artery wall. Drug-eluting stents, as they are known, are more effective at keeping arteries open than those with older bare-metal designs.

Cordis prospered by counting on cardiologists to explain to patients why they needed a drug-eluting coronary stent. And, as with other medical implants, patients counted on the doctors to choose the best stent for them. By the end of 2004, the doctors implanting stents were choosing either a Cypher or the [Taxus](#) from [Boston Scientific](#), Cypher’s only drug-eluting rival in the United States, for well over 80 percent of their patients.

But safety perceptions became a growing concern for Cordis toward the end of 2006 after research reports surfaced suggesting that Cypher and Taxus might cause potentially dangerous clots long after they were implanted. Sales of the two stents fell by more than \$1 billion, or nearly 40 percent, in the United States as anxious doctors and patients chose other options like bypass surgery, bare-metal stents or drug therapy.

Throughout the decline, stent makers — as well as doctors who implant stents — argued that the fears were overblown. By this fall, with new data supporting those views, Cordis felt the time was ripe to advertise heavily.

“The evidence supporting the Cypher stent has never looked better,” Dr. Kandzari said.

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But Cordis had a second important motive for the campaign. Stent branding is expected to become much more important in 2008 because two other health care giants, [Medtronic](#) and [Abbott Laboratories](#), are expected to gain approval to market drug-eluting stents in the United States. Both Medtronic’s Endeavor stent and Abbott’s Xience V have grabbed market share from Cypher in Europe.

Medtronic has told Wall Street it expects the [Food and Drug Administration](#) to approve Endeavor by the end of this month. Abbott is forecasting clearance for Xience V in the first half of 2008. Many analysts project that Cypher will fall to fourth place in the United States in 2009, with Xience V — which will also be marketed by Boston Scientific as the Promus — challenging Taxus for the market lead.

In its clinical trials, Xience V proved superior to Taxus in combating reclogging — the first time any drug-eluting stent demonstrated statistical superiority to a rival in rigorous testing.

Cordis turned to BBDO, a frequent Johnson & Johnson partner, for the consumer side of the campaign, which began with full-page ads on Oct. 5 in USA Today, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. Harrison & Star, an Omnicom agency that specializes in health care, got the assignment for advertising in professional journals.

The Cypher campaign bears similarities to an effort in the first half of this year by Medtronic to bolster patient confidence in implanted heart [defibrillators](#). Medtronic hoped its ads, which emphasized how defibrillators could save lives, would overcome [anxiety](#) created by recalls in 2005 and 2006 of defective products. The spotlight during the recalls had primarily been on Guidant — now a Boston Scientific subsidiary — but sales also slumped for Medtronic, the market leader.

Wall Street has generally written off the Medtronic campaign (reported to be a \$100 million effort, with 10 percent to 20 percent directed at consumers) as a wasted investment. But far more patients get heart stents than defibrillators, and the Cypher campaign is unfolding in a more favorable environment thanks to the availability of new safety data. So what do those who follow the market closely expect?

“It may offset some of the negative publicity about drug-eluting stents, but I doubt it will shift market share,” said Jason Wittes, a medical device stock analyst at Leerink Swann. “It may be

too little, too late, as far as branding.”

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