

4.12 SAMPLING

During their visits to prescribing physicians, PSRs may leave samples of product. In order to inform the expert public on the characteristics of a newly introduced drug, it is permitted to give one smallest package of the new drug, with a note on the packaging: 'Free sample, not for sale' (Law on Drugs and Medical Devices of the Republic of Serbia, 2004, Article 97, paragraph 2). Regard handing out samples as the best way of introducing prescribing physicians to the pharmacological features of the drug, as the sample will provide them with the opportunity to evaluate the effects of the drug in a specific 'personal clinical trial'. In most cases, the source authors relate handing out samples to the opportunity to:

- Enable the patients to have instant access to therapy when it is not available at the given time.
- Enable the patients to try a drug before they acquire a quantity required for complete therapy (of acute diseases) or make a decision to start a certain therapy (of chronic conditions), with possible therapy adjustments.
- Provide the patient's with short-term 'financial aid' by providing a certain quantity of the drug free of charge. Burns (2005) argues that very often PSRs use the possibility of handing out samples to access the physicians.

That is, in order to use samples rationally, companies must monitor and measure the degree to which physicians respond to received samples by changing their habits in prescribing pharmacological therapies. McGuire refers to a study published in *American Journal of Medicine*, which claims that samples significantly change physicians' drug prescribing patterns. At the moment when they run out of samples, they continue to prescribe this medicine, rarely going back to the drug they used to prescribe, or an alternative therapy. The study concludes that the logic of samples is dominated by the producers' intention to introduce new, expensive drugs into practice, and that the short-term positive financial effect for the patients who receive them is negligible. One of the objective problems debated in the