



# Clinical trials as marketing: the case of obesity

Petra Jonvallen, PhD  
Luleå University of Technology  
[petra.jonvallen@ltu.se](mailto:petra.jonvallen@ltu.se)

- The relationship between marketing and clinical trials
- Types of market orientation in one case study

# ”Seeding trials”

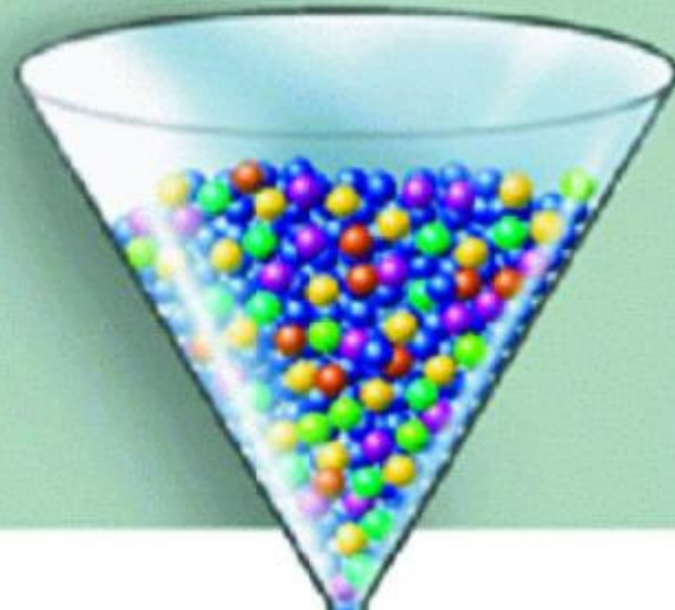
”attempts to entice doctors to prescribe a new drug being marketed by the company”

(Kessler et al 1994, New England Journal of Medicine)

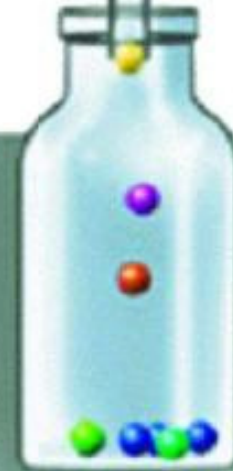
”clinical studies conducted by pharmaceutical companies that are designed to seem as if they answer a scientific question but primarily fulfill marketing objectives”

(Hill et al 2008, Annals of Internal Medicine)

**DISCOVERY**



**DEVELOPMENT**



**MARKET**



# Research *and* marketing

- Both doctors and pharmaceutical entrepreneurs have interests in the marketing of a condition or drug as “scientific” since it helps establish the scientific status of both groups.
- In the striving for a scientific image, the clinic and the pharmaceutical industry matches each others’ needs, a process in which obesity drugs became of mutual interest and gradually developed into big science and big business (cf Oudshoorn 1994)

# COUNTERTHINK

© 2006 by Truth Publishing International, Ltd.



CONCEPT-MIKE ADAMS -ART-DAN BERGER -WWW.NEWSTARGET.COM

*“Market orientation” is the foremost marketing task in the future*

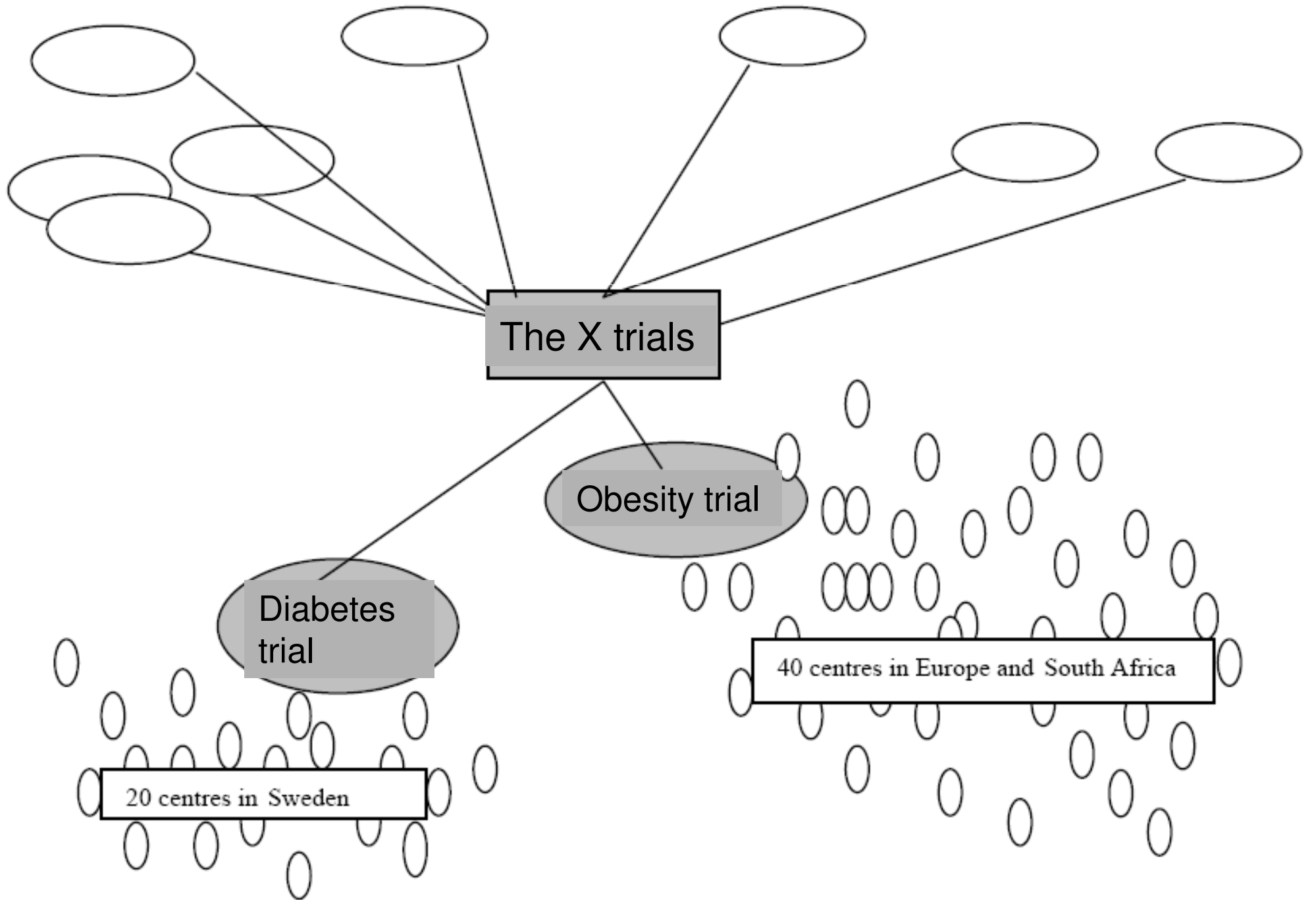
*(Gassman et al 2004, *Leading Pharmaceutical Innovation: Trends and Drivers for Growth in the Pharmaceutical Industry*)*

# Types of market orientation

- Product awareness: market is made aware of the product's existence and benefits
- Disease awareness/promotion campaigns
- Market configuration

# *The X trials*





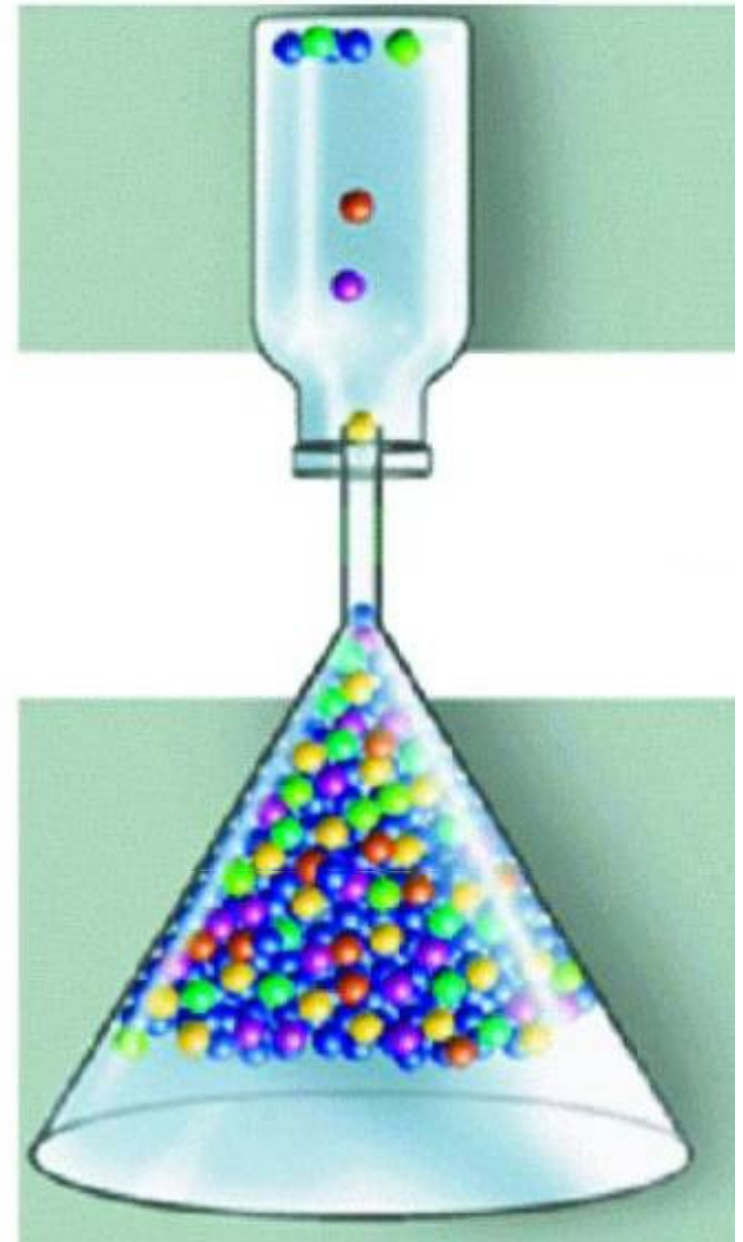
# Pharmaceutical company's data monitoring board in 2001

- Unanimous conclusion that X was “highly effective” in comparison to existing drugs (5-10 % weight loss)
- “Acceptable” side effects for the groups who received the lower dosage of the substance.
- Visceral weight loss was higher than the total body weight loss (efficacy in terms of diabetes)
- The monitoring board ended its report by strongly urging the firm to continue the evaluation of the substance as soon as possible. Future trials would not include the higher dosages with the unacceptable safety profiles, and it is suggested that the most serious side effect, suicidal ideation, could be addressed by “appropriate labeling”.

**MARKET**

**DEVELOPMENT**

**”DISCOVERY”**



# The "WEIGHT campaign"

- TV advertisement
- Internet site
- Self-screening by BMI
- Database

# News in Swedish tabloid about X being tested for obesity

”– A man weighing 100 kilo can lose 12 kilos during a two-year period. Without exercising and dieting.

– But, of course you should exercise and eat right.

[The doctor] thinks that the developments of obesity drugs is lagging behind.

– Today, we are at the same baby stadium as the medications for high blood pressure was 30 years ago.”

# Buying X on the internet

- Swedish Medical Products Agency warns people from buying X through the internet (2004)

→ Unintended market

# Other clues of market orientation?

## 1. Many fringe benefits

”When you’re workingn with trials you get these ... bribes or whatever you call them... We were in London and got to stay in a luxury hotel , and we got things. For Christmas, Easter, Summer vacation. There was always something. A jacket, bags (really nice), lots of these big knives that were probably worth a lot. Linen. Different kinds of bags, well a little bit of everything I guess. But honestly, I am not that interested in those things because I would rather stay at home and be at work than on these trips where the money was *flowing*. I’m telling you. I mean we went to fine wine restaurants and were served really nice wines all the time. And it’s a lot of people, not just the head nurses, but people from all different parts of the study. And the monitor [from the pharmaceutical company] always wanted us to go out for dinner, that we should celebrate this and that. Why do they do that, you can ask yourself.” (trial nurse 1)

## 2. "Too healthy" patients

"It's very different. Some have high cholesterols that you have a discussion about how or if to treat, depending on what their risk factors are. But many are overweight, so in that sense they have a disease - those that don't lose weight, many have a BMI over 35-40. They are sick *and* there is a big risk of them *becoming* ill. And then there are some that have low glucose tolerance, and even though they don't have diabetes *yet* they are at risk of developing it. So there's a lot you can talk to them about. And then there has been a lot of talk about the cognitive side effects that we have had to focus a lot on. But aside from that, there really hasn't been som much, although it felt like that for a while. All those who lost weight *didn't* have cognitive side effects. But a lot of things do happen when you follow someone for a year and a half – *anyone* you follow. They change their jobs, they have personal crisis of different sorts, and they are worried about their children... Actually, I don't know if they have felt worse than any other population."

(trial doctor 2)

# Summing up

Research and marketing is intertwined

Talking to different groups involved in trials  
you get different pictures (trial as care,  
industrial production process, research,  
marketing)

Are all trials run by pharmaceutical  
companies on potentially large markets  
also marketing trials?

Mum, what does FDA stand for?

That's a good question, sweetheart. What do you think it stands for? Maybe it means 'Fatal Drug Approvers'. Either that or 'Fibbing Doctors Anonymous' . . . . how about 'Fraud and Death Association'?

FDA PUSHES  
FOR STRICT  
CONTROLS  
ON VITAMINS

Emma Holton 2005