Cancer Center Advertising—Where Hope Meets Hype

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Cancer centers advertise to reach patients and their families in a very competitive market. Patients often have dangerous cancers and face toxic treatments and the advertisements offer hope. But the hope can—and often does—morph into hype. After all, this is advertising. Medicine has long been ambivalent about advertising services. The AMA’s original code of ethics banned advertising as “derogatory to the profession” and “reprehensible” until forced to relent by federal courts in 1980. However, as Vater et al show in this issue of JAMA Internal Medicine, the marketing of cancer services is growing. An essential question is how to ensure that advertisements do not take advantage of vulnerable patients.