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► **COVER:** 'Buy one get one free' by Lara Crow, inspired by the Science and Society article on p142.



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We live in an age of information, and it reaches us in more ways than ever before: but is everyone able to cope with this increasing bombardment? Although many of us might happily throw both computer and cellphone into the nearest trash can for just a few minutes peace, most of us love this technology because it means that we can find out information on a specific subject rapidly — we are scientists and we love knowledge! It is easy to forget that not everyone has the ability to deal with the information that reaches them, especially when this information is medical in nature.

On page 142, Emily Z. Kontos and K. Viswanath discuss direct-to-consumer advertising of cancer-related products, including genetic testing. Many have argued that making the public aware of medical treatments and ways of improving their health empowers them when they become ill. However, it is not clear that this is true for complex health issues, such as a potential genetic risk for developing cancer. Although cancer patients have reported that advertisements for new drugs that appear in cancer patient-focused literature are useful and aid them in making decisions about treatment, it is clear from other studies that these benefits vary between social groups on the basis of ethnicity, class and education. Kontos and Viswanath remind us that we cannot assume that advertisements reach everyone in the population equally, and that not everybody is able to understand them or to find out more information. The 'knowledge gap hypothesis' — that individuals from higher socio-economic groups acquire knowledge more rapidly than those from lower socio-economic groups — is often overlooked, but is a crucial point if everyone is to benefit from the advances that genomics and proteomics look set to bring us.

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