The Prescrire Awards 2015

The three annual Prescrire Awards, for Drugs, Packaging and Information, are granted in total independence by the Prescrire Editorial Staff. The rules governing the three Prescrire Awards are available online at english.prescrire.org.

2015 Prescrire Drug Awards

New products or new indications evaluated during the previous year in the New Products section of our French edition are eligible for the Prescrire Drug Awards.

Pilule d’Or / Golden Pill

The Pilule d’Or (Golden Pill) has been granted since 1981 to drugs that constitute a major therapeutic advance in a field in which no treatment was previously available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015</th>
<th>NOT AWARDED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014 (n° 376)</td>
<td>ORPHACOL°C (cholic acid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007 (n° 292)</td>
<td>CARBAGLU°C (carglumic acid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006 (n° 280)</td>
<td>ORFADIN°C (nilotinone)</td>
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<td>1998 (n° 192)</td>
<td>CRIXIVAN°C (indinavir)</td>
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<td>1996 (n° 169)</td>
<td>DIGIDOT°C (digoxin-specific antibody) (1)</td>
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<td>1992 (n° 125)</td>
<td>SURFEO°C (pulmonary surfactant) (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989 (n° 92)</td>
<td>EPREX° (epoetin alpha) • MECTIZAN° (ivermectin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988 (n° 81)</td>
<td>LARIAM° (mefloquine) • RETROVIR° (zidovudine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987 (n° 71)</td>
<td>LUTRELEF° (gonadorelin) • DECAPEPTYL° (triptorelin)</td>
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<td>1986 (n° 61)</td>
<td>ZOVIRAX° IV and tablets (aciclovir)</td>
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<td>1983 (n° 31)</td>
<td>LOPRIL° (captopril)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981 (n° 10)</td>
<td>VACCIN HEVAC B° (hepatitis B vaccine)</td>
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(1) - No longer marketed in France.
These awards honour drugs that constitute a therapeutic advance, in that they offer better efficacy, fewer or less severe adverse effects (for similar efficacy), or safer or easier administration.

**No Golden Pill awarded in 2015.** Three of the products featured in the New Products section of our French edition in 2015 earned a Prescrire Drug Award this year. One was included on the Honours List, two were deemed “Noteworthy”, but none constituted a sufficient therapeutic advance to warrant a Golden Pill Award. None of these three products contain a novel active ingredient. However, in the clinical situation for which they were granted marketing authorisation, they constitute an advance over the products already available.

**Propranolol oral solution and severe haemangioma: a chance discovery, followed by development of a paediatric form.** Some infants have a severe haemangioma that could cause complications (due to its size and location), ulceration, bleeding or disfigurement. Propranolol oral solution has become the drug of choice in this situation. It is more effective than placebo and its adverse effects are more acceptable overall than that of long-term oral corticosteroid therapy. Treatment initiation and dose increases should take place in hospital, with careful monitoring of the child. Propranolol oral solution has been granted marketing authorisation in the European Union solely for paediatric use. Its packaging is conducive to safe use and safe dose preparation.

**Permethrin in scabies, ketoconazole in Cushing’s syndrome: welcome marketing authorisations.** Permethrin 5% cream is at last readily obtainable in France to treat classic scabies, since being granted full marketing authorisation, and being made available in the community and reimbursable by the national health insurance system. Its main value is for the treatment of young children, because ivermectin is not approved for use in children weighing less than 15 kg.

After about 30 years of off-label use in the rare but serious endogenous Cushing’s syndrome, oral ketoconazole has finally been granted marketing authorisation for this indication. In this situation, data from non-comparative case series in a total of 800 patients suggest that oral ketoconazole is effective in more than half of patients. However, its use requires precautions on account of its hepatotoxicity and strong potential for drug interactions.

**Few therapeutic advances.** While many new marketing authorisations were granted in 2015, few constituted a real therapeutic advance. Knowing how to sift through the multitude of available drugs to identify those with the best harm-benefit balance in a given situation, and knowing to avoid drugs that are more dangerous than useful is also an area where important advances can be made for the benefit of patients (see Towards better patient care: drugs to avoid in 2016 in a coming issue).

Regulators and policy makers should impose stricter requirements on new drugs, by demanding evidence that they actually constitute a therapeutic advance. This would prevent inundation of the market with products that offer no advantages in patient care and that, in some cases, are more dangerous than useful. It would also help contain the excesses this situation generates: extravagant marketing aimed at health professionals and patients, incentives to prescribe and purchase drugs, and spiralling health expenditure.
Prescrire’s systematic reviews in the New Products section include evaluation of the drugs’ packaging. Is it clear from the labelling which active substance or substances the product contains? How are doses prepared and administered? Does the information in the patient leaflet help users avoid errors and dangers?

When analysing a drug’s packaging, including the patient leaflet, and how convenient it is to use, we take into account every aspect of the context in which it will be used: the clinical situation; the patients concerned, in particular children, pregnant women and elderly patients; and the setting in which it will be obtained, prepared and administered (in hospital, with the intervention of a nurse, or in the community, either prescribed by a doctor, advised by a community pharmacist, or bought by the patient from a pharmacy or an Internet retailer).

Every aspect of the packaging is examined to determine its quality and safety (clarity, accuracy, suitability to the situation). Is the drug supplied in a multidose container or is each dose packaged individually? What measures have been taken to protect children from poisoning? We examine: the information on the labelling that is useful for patient care, including the legibility of international nonproprietary names (INNs) and the dose strength; the packaging liable to cause dangerous dose preparation errors.

The vial contains 10 to 20 doses of the vaccine and the graduation scale on the syringe supplied in the box corresponds to 10 to 20 times the recommended dose. These flaws are liable to cause overdoses and adverse effects. This product already received a Prescrire Red Card in 2007. Its packaging has not been improved and serious errors continue to occur.

This antidepressant (with an unfavourable harm-benefit balance) is taken once a day, yet the dosing schedule on the box shows 3 boxes, labelled “morning”, “midday” and “evening”. The confusion this is likely to cause could result in overdoses and more, or more severe, adverse effects.

Neither the pharmaceutical forms nor the packaging of these products is suitable for preparation of the recommended paediatric doses, which could lead to confusion, wrong-dose errors and adverse effects.

None of the bottles used for these products has a child-proof cap. Children could therefore ingest their contents, with potentially serious consequences.

2015 Prescrire Packaging Awards

The Packaging Awards focus on the quality of the packaging of drugs evaluated in 2015 in our French edition.

No Packaging Award

in 2015

Dangerous shortcomings in the information provided in the labelling or patient leaflet

• Doli État Grippal® powder for oral solution in sachets (paracetamol + pheniramine + vitamin C) Sanofi Aventis (Rev Prescrire n° 375)

“Doli” is printed in large, bold characters on the box, as it is on the boxes of all the products of the Doli® umbrella brand. This can lead to confusion between the products, some of which contain different active ingredients, such as the dangerous vasoconstrictor pseudoephedrine. The INNs paracetamol and pheniramine are much less obvious than “Doli”.

• Antalcalm® medicated plasters (diclofenac) Pierre Fabre Médicament (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Asproflash® tablets (acetylsalicylic acid) Bayer Healthcare (Consumer Care division) (Rev Prescrire n° 381)

• Opalgyne® vaginal solution (benzydamine) Innotech International (Rev Prescrire n° 379)

The patient leaflets of these products contain insufficient information about the harms of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) during pregnancy. They fail to warn patients about concerns that NSAIDs may provoke spontaneous abortion and malformations when taken during the first trimester of pregnancy, or about the sometimes irreversible renal damage or pulmonary arterial hypertension reported in children following exposure to an NSAID during the second trimester. These leaflets only state that the product concerned is contraindicated from the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy. It would be better to avoid NSAIDs throughout pregnancy until the age of the patient. The leaflet’s mention of the product is inadequate.

• Colpotrophine® vaginal cream and capsules (promestriene) Teva Santé (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Gydrel® vaginal cream (estradiol) Ivrad Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Physiojine® vaginal cream and pessaries (estradiol) H.A.C. Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Trophicrim® vaginal cream (estradiol) Sanofi Aventis (Rev Prescrire n° 383)

The patient leaflets of these products contain insufficient information about the long-term harms of vaginal oestrogens, which are identical in nature to those of oral oestrogen therapy: arterial and venous thrombosis, as well as breast and endometrial cancer.

• Vaccin BCG SSI® powder and solvent for suspension for injection (BCG) Sanofi Pasteur MSD (Rev Prescrire n° 385)
information presented graphically, such as dosing schedules and pictograms; any devices provided for preparing or administering the required dose; the quality and clarity of the information provided in the patient leaflet on how to prepare the doses to be administered, on adverse effects, and on the situations and patient groups in which the drug poses a risk.

The Packaging Awards are based on the assessments conducted by Prescrire’s Packaging Working Group, in total independence, free from any influence from packaging manufacturers.

No Award in 2015, but various dangers to report. None of the packaging examined in 2015 satisfied all the requirements concerning safety and therapeutic advance to earn a Prescrire Packaging Award. However, the dangers identified are illustrated in this year’s edition by the 20 or so products that received a Red or Yellow Card: some lack a child-proof cap, others provide no means of preparing doses for children, some patient leaflets fail to warn users of known dangers.

A non-exhaustive list of packaging flaws. Increasing numbers of drugs are placed on the market in packaging that could lead to difficulty or poorly evaluated dangers, for example: cancer drugs such as cytotoxic agents, in bulk bottles; insulins marketed at different concentrations; and the continued growth of umbrella brands.

The Prescrire Packaging Awards and the annual drug packaging review (to be published in a coming issue) reflect the true state of affairs as regards the safe use of drugs. The overall picture is disturbing.

2015 Prescrire Information Awards

The Information Awards focus on the information provided to Prescrire by the companies whose products we examined in the New Products section of our French edition in 2015.

Pharmaceutical companies hold a wealth of information on the drugs they market or withdraw from the market. They have a responsibility to share this information, in part to help ensure that their drugs are used appropriately and to protect patients from certain risks.

As part of its systematic literature search, Prescrire requests clinical data, packaging, and administrative and regulatory information from drug companies, then compares them with information obtained from other sources. Prescrire’s Information Awards reflect how each company assumes this responsibility to share information.

Still too little transparency on the part of drug companies in 2015. On the whole, pharmaceutical companies supply Prescrire with a lot of information, some new and some that we have obtained elsewhere. But they are less cooperative when asked to provide relevant, detailed documentation containing unpublished data, which for example could include details about adverse effects.

Some companies choose to be transparent. These companies are placed on the Honours List. And those rated as “Outstanding” provided us with useful, detailed data without delay and sometimes without being asked. Other companies fail to respond to some or all of our requests for information, or provide only limited data. Some of them delay their response, then fail to provide usable information. Some omit the most important data. Red Cards are given to highlight persistent shortcomings in the provision of information by certain drug companies.

In 2015, few pharmaceutical companies embraced transparency by agreeing to share with health professionals all the data they hold, in particular data on adverse effects.