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Independence is essential

Life is not straightforward for doctors, pharmacists or nurses, whether they are hospital-based or self-employed. Every day, they need to make choices to find solutions to real-life problems.

Patients tend to worry about their health, search for information about health issues, and want to play an active role in the decisions that affect them.

Both health professionals and patients are looking for reliable information on which to base treatment decisions. However, instead of finding this information easily, they are often hacking their way through a morass of medical and pharmaceutical information of variable quality. Healthcare professionals do not always have the time, and patients are frequently ill-prepared or unprepared, to unearth high-quality information.

Whom can we trust?

Therapeutic innovation is at a standstill, medical research is making little headway, and the cutthroat competition that exists between pharmaceutical companies is detrimental to patients and public health. Many drug companies focus on immediate profits. Unfortunately, health professionals who lend their support to the drug companies, unquestioningly putting their advice into practice, may be making unacceptable compromises in the quality of patient care.

The public organisations, drug regulatory agencies and other organisations that produce health guidelines do not always inspire confidence, with their excessive protection of the pharmaceutical industry's commercial interests at the expense of the public interest, as well as their fluctuating, contradictory policies. Their intentions may be commendable, they clearly want to do the right thing, but the results are too often disappointing.

To whom can we turn?

To the increasing number of teams who are committed to improving the quality of care they provide to patients.

Teams who have been independent since their inception or that have become independent, who work without compromise, free from undue influence, where every penny is invested in a transparent and verifiable manner, free of any commercial or corporate influence (see p. 138-139 of this issue for a presentation of *Association Mieux Prescrire's* finances).

Obviously, independence is not enough, but it is an indispensable prerequisite for establishing trust: a relationship of trust that is essential between patients and healthcare professionals.

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