



Nicole would like to understand the INN system

She discusses drug names with her pharmacist:

– What's an INN?

Her pharmacist explains:

– The INN is the international nonproprietary name for the active ingredient in a medicine. Thanks to the INN, you can always be sure what drug you are taking.

– And the trade name, what's that?

– The drug manufacturer chooses the trade name. The aim is to grab your attention and help sell the product. Some manufacturers even use different names for the same drug when they sell it for two different uses, such as toothache and menstrual pain.

– Is the INN the same as the generic name?

– No. Generics are copies of existing drugs: they contain the same active ingredient, in the same pharmaceutical form and at the same dosage. Their trade names sometimes resemble the INN, but they can also be very different!

– It's all rather confusing...

– I'm afraid so. More than 8000 trade names are used in France for only 1700 different active ingredients (and, remember, that means only 1700 INNs). For example, there are more than 90 different trade names for paracetamol-based products in France, and several hundred in the world!

The INN is clearer and less confusing

The INN (International Nonproprietary Name) is quite simply a drug's real name. Created by the World Health Organization (WHO), the INN system is used throughout the world. It allows healthcare professionals and patients to identify a drug precisely and with confidence, and to avoid potentially serious adverse effects due to confusion between drugs. With the INN, everything is simpler, clearer and more precise.

Ask your doctor and pharmacist to explain the INN system



"The INN campaign: a drug's real name": explanations and other materials produced by the Medicines in Europe Forum are available from the following websites:

– Association Mieux Prescrire (www.prescrire.org)

– Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité Française (www.mutualite.fr)

– Union Fédérale des Consommateurs Que Choisir (www.quechoisir.org)

The INN, a drug's real name: leaflets are available to download for free at www.prescrire.org, along with explanations of the reasons for using the INN and the (rare) drawbacks.