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Drug prices, therapeutic value and access to medicines: civil society adds its voice to the debate in France, to defend the public interest

Faced with significant price increases for new drugs, in North and South alike, particularly drugs for cancer, hepatitis C and rare diseases, civil society in France is taking action to defend access to best-quality care for all, and to safeguard the public healthcare system. Several organisations representing patients, healthcare users, healthcare professionals and students have joined together to publish a White Paper (in French) entitled:

“Drugs and therapeutic advance: guaranteeing access, bringing prices under control”
(“Médicaments et progrès thérapeutique : garantir l'accès, maîtriser les prix”)

Based on our shared position, our 8 organisations contributed 12 texts, collected together in this White Paper, which aims to speak on behalf of civil society in the public debate, at a time when the French government is set to meet with industry representatives on 10 July, for a Strategic Council on healthcare industries.

The texts address two key concerns.

Analysis and proposals to move beyond false ideas

The various organisations, within their respective areas of expertise, have observed that medicines policy has gone seriously astray. They have spoken out against the opacity of drug prices and their components, the lack of transparency in negotiations between government and industry, and the dangerous budgetary and financial consequences for France's national health insurance system. They have alerted the authorities about the threats hanging over the access to new and costly treatments, while some older drugs are plagued by intolerable shortages.

They have criticised talk of “innovation” which above all serves to justify exorbitant prices, without properly defining just what innovation means, and without any guarantees that it provides any actual improvement in the quality of care for those who are most affected, the persons living with these diseases.

Based on analysis of public data, documented practical situations and intellectual property issues, on research, on clinical trials and on transparency, the texts brought together in this White Paper aim to provide citizens, policy makers and elected officials with information that goes beyond certain commonplaces that are too often mistaken for established and intangible truths.

Transparency and democracy: needed for the maintenance of a universal healthcare system

The constant price inflation for new treatments is a threat to equal access to healthcare, and to the survival of France's universal healthcare system. By speaking out together, our organisations, in all their diversity, proclaim that this is not inevitable. Innovations whose efficacy has been demonstrated must be made accessible, and their appropriate use must be guaranteed. Prices must be better controlled so that therapeutic progress first and foremost benefits patients, but without discouraging innovation. To do that, we call for real transparency at all levels: from medical research and its funding to the pricing and marketing of healthcare products, along with transparency regarding the level of therapeutic advance a healthcare product actually delivers.

We also wish to be more involved in decision-making regarding medicines policy, and we call for a truly democratic debate to be held. This democratic debate must be structured so as to fulfil the requirement that all of our organisations agree upon: **based upon drug prescriptions justified solely by health considerations, France's universal healthcare system must guarantee access to therapeutic progress to all those who need it.**

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