THE PRESCRIRE AWARDS FOR 2024

The annual Prescrire Awards are granted in total independence by the Prescrire Editorial Staff.

2024 Prescrire Drug Awards

Every month, Prescrire's Editorial Staff help health professionals decide which of the multitude of newly authorised products or indications are worth adding to their list of useful treatment options, and which are to be avoided. We do this by conducting systematic analyses of the relevant evaluation data available on new drugs, new indications, new pharmaceutical forms and new dose strengths authorised in Europe or in France. European authorisations account for the majority and are the focus of our English edition, *Prescrire International*. The 2024 Prescrire Drug Awards are based on the reviews published in the Marketing Authorisations section of our French edition in 2024.

The multidisciplinary Prescrire team behind these annual independent drug awards is free from the influence of any companies involved in the healthcare sector.

One Pilule d'Or for a neglected disease

Prescrire awarded one Pilule d'Or (Golden Pill) this year, to a drug for a neglected disease. One other drug (authorised in France) was deemed "Noteworthy". Although some of the other drugs analysed in Prescrire over the course of 2024 represented a therapeutic advance for certain patients, especially in the field of oncology, we chose not to give them an award because their clinical evaluation was insufficiently robust (see editorial "Why drugs should be evaluated in several randomised comparative trials", p. 115).

A Pilule d'Or for fexinidazole in sleeping sickness due to Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense. In southern and eastern Africa, human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) is mainly due to infection with *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense*. If left untreated, it is almost always fatal within a few weeks to a few months. Before the arrival of *fexinidazole* (a 5-nitroimidazole derivative with antiparasitic activity), treatment of *T. brucei rhodesiense* infection was based on intravenous drugs, in particular the arsenic derivative *melarsoprol*. With these treatments, mortality is less than 22%. *Melarsoprol* has frequent serious adverse effects, including reactive encephalopathy, which occurs in 5% to 18% of patients and is fatal in 10% to 70% of cases.

A non-comparative trial included 45 *T. brucei rhodesiense*-infected patients living in Uganda and Malawi, 35 of whom had second-stage disease (the most serious). They all received oral *fexinidazole*. After a one-year follow-up, 44 patients were still alive. Given the natural course of this disease, this result provides sufficiently strong evidence that *fexinidazole* is highly effective in this infection, despite the absence of a control group. In addition, *fexinidazole*'s adverse effect profile is fairly well known, due to the long history of use of nitroimidazole drugs and its use in sleeping sickness caused by a different parasite. It includes fewer serious adverse effects than that of *melarsoprol*.

Fexinidazole is administered orally, making it easier to use than intravenous *melarsoprol* in patients who live in regions with limited health infrastructure.

The clinical research on *fexinidazole* in sleeping sickness was conducted by the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), a non-profit organisation that aims to develop treatments for neglected populations, i.e. patients with infectious diseases for which no treatments exist, or where the treatments available are ineffective, more dangerous than beneficial, unaffordable, or unsuited to these patients' circumstances (see also "Development of fexinidazole: a product of exemplary collaboration" *Prescrire Int* December 2020).

Fexinidazole Winthrop° was awarded the 2024 Pilule d'Or in recognition of this major therapeutic advance in the treatment of a neglected disease.

Pilule d'Or

A Pilule d'Or (Golden Pill) is awarded to drugs that represent a major therapeutic advance in a particularly poorly served field.

Fexinidazole Winthrop° (*fexinidazole*)
Sanofi Winthrop

In sleeping sickness due to infection with *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense* (*Prescrire Int* n° 269)

Honours List

Drugs included on the Honours List constitute a clear advance for some patients compared with existing therapeutic options, albeit with limitations.

No drugs made the Honours List in 2024

Noteworthy

Drugs deemed "Noteworthy" provide a modest improvement in patient care.

Bicafres° (*sodium bicarbonate*)
Fresenius Medical Care

In metabolic acidosis due to chronic kidney disease, (*Rev Prescrire* n° 487)

Noteworthy: sodium bicarbonate tablets with marketing authorisation, an old drug that is useful in metabolic acidosis associated with chronic kidney disease. Patients with chronic kidney disease can develop metabolic acidosis with potentially serious clinical consequences. *Sodium bicarbonate* is a drug of choice, with probable efficacy in limiting the progression of renal failure, and possibly in reducing mortality.

It is an old drug, of course. The new development honoured in the 2024 Prescrire Drug Awards is that *sodium bicarbonate* gastro-resistant tablets have been granted marketing authorisation in France, where, previously, oral *sodium bicarbonate* was only available as an extemporaneous preparation. This marketing authorisation constitutes a therapeutic advance because it guarantees high-quality manufacturing standards and labelling, including the provision of a patient leaflet.

Bicafres° earned the title of Noteworthy drug in recognition of this administrative procedure, which guarantees the quality of a cheap and useful drug.

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2024 Prescrire Packaging Awards

When Prescrire evaluates a drug's harm-benefit balance and ease of use, its packaging is an important factor to take into account and analyse. Does the packaging help ensure the safety of patients, their families and their caregivers? Do any aspects of the packaging increase the risk of medication errors or pose a particular danger? Is the packaging well-designed from the users' perspective, enabling accurate measurement of the doses to be administered, for example?

Our packaging analyses take many factors into account, including: the clinical situations in which the drug will be used; the patients liable to receive it, such as pregnant women, children, or older adults or patients with a disability who may, for example, have reduced manual dexterity; whether family members, carers or nurses will prepare and administer the drug; the context in which it will be used (e.g. in a healthcare facility, possibly in an emergency setting); and whether it will be obtained on prescription or on the advice of a community pharmacist.

Every aspect of the packaging is analysed for its impact on quality of care and the safety of patients and the people around them. We examine, in particular:
– Whether international nonproprietary names (INNs) are clearly legible, and whether different dose strengths of the same drug are easily distinguishable;
– The clarity of any information presented graphically, such as diagrams showing how to prepare the dose to be administered, dosing schedules, symbols or pictograms;
– The devices provided for dose preparation, measurement or administration;
– The quality, intelligibility and clarity of the information provided in the patient leaflet, especially in the sections on how to use the product, its adverse effects, and the situations and patient populations in which the drug poses a particular risk;
– The risk of accidental ingestion, for example by a child.

The 2024 Prescrire Packaging Awards pertain to the packaging of drugs evaluated in our French edition in 2024. One product has earned an award for its particularly well-designed packaging. Those for which we identified packaging flaws that increase the risk of medication errors or pose other dangers received a Packaging Red Card.

One Packaging Award in 2024

A product with well-designed packaging, marketed in France

Lidocaine Aguettant 10 mg/ml solution for injection in pre-filled syringes (***lidocaine***) - Aguettant (*Rev Prescrire* n° 494)

Pre-filled syringes containing 100 mg of *lidocaine* in 10 ml of solution per syringe (10 mg/ml) are authorised in France for local anaesthesia and peripheral nerve block in adults and children from 2 years of age, and for intravenous regional anaesthesia of the upper limbs in adults. Prescrire examined this product when it became available in the community, rather than just in hospitals. This ready-to-use presentation simplifies aseptic preparation of the injection. It is both convenient for healthcare professionals and safe for patients.

Packaging Red Cards

11 dry oral forms packaged in multidose bottles, authorised in the European Union

Ayvakyt° tablets (***avapritinib***) - Blueprint Medicines (*Prescrire Int* n° 262)
Biktarvy° tablets (***bictegravir*** 30 mg + ***emtricitabine*** 120 mg + ***tenofovir alafenamide*** 15 mg) - Gilead Sciences (*Prescrire Int* n° 261)
Brukinsa° hard capsules (***zanubrutinib***) - Beigene (*Prescrire Int* n° 261)
Cufence° hard capsules (***trientine***) - Intsel Chimos (*Rev Prescrire* n° 493)
Genvoya° tablets (***elvitegravir*** 90 mg + ***cobicistat*** 90 mg + ***emtricitabine*** 120 mg + ***tenofovir alafenamide*** 6 mg) - Gilead Sciences (*Prescrire Int* n° 265)

Opfolda° hard capsules (***miglustat***) - Amicus Therapeutics (*Prescrire Int* n° 267)
Orgovyx° tablets (***relugolix***) - Accord Healthcare (*Prescrire Int* n° 264)
Tibsovo° tablets (***ivosidenib***) - Servier (*Rev Prescrire* n° 265)
Triumeq° tablets (***dolutegravir*** 5 mg + ***abacavir*** 60 mg + ***lamivudine*** 30 mg) - ViiV Healthcare (*Rev Prescrire* n° 485)
Wakix° tablets (***pitolisant***) - Bioprojet Pharma (*Prescrire Int* n° 260)
Zokinvy° hard capsules (***lonafarnib***) - Intsel Chimos (*Prescrire Int* n° 262)

Multidose bottles have several disadvantages compared with pre-cut unit-dose blister packs. For example, when the tablet or capsule is removed from the bottle and placed in a pill organiser, at home or in a healthcare or residential care facility, it is more difficult to identify the drug and its dose strength, and the drug is less well protected from environmental conditions such as humidity or light. There is also a greater risk of accidental spillage of the bottle's contents and, consequently, of accidental ingestion of the drug by someone other than the patient, especially a child.

4 products authorised in France with labelling that fails to inform patients and healthcare professionals about certain risks

Cabesol° shampoo - Medgen, **Clobetasol Substipharm°** shampoo - Substipharm, **Clobex°** shampoo - Galderma (***clobetasol***) (*Rev Prescrire* n° 490)
Mantadix° capsules (***amantadine***) - X.O (*Rev Prescrire* n° 493)

6 products with packaging flaws that increase the risk of administration errors, including 3 European authorisations

Vivotif° capsules (***Salmonella enterica serovar Typhi***) - Imaxio (*Rev Prescrire* n° 492) (French authorisation)

Pentacarinat° powder for aerosol and for parenteral use - Sanofi Winthrop, **Pentamidine Tillomed°** powder for solution for injection or nebulisation - Tillomed Pharma (***pentamidine***) (*Rev Prescrire* n° 489) (French authorisations)

Vabysmo° solution for intravitreal injection (***faricimab***) - Roche (*Prescrire Int* n° 260)

As with other solutions for intravitreal injection that contain a VEGF inhibitor, such as *aflibercept* (Eylea° or other brands) and *ranibizumab* (Lucentis° or other brands), the volume of *faricimab* solution to be injected into the eye is only a fraction of the contents of the vial. However, the entire contents of the vial must be withdrawn using a filter needle supplied in the box. A new needle is then attached to the syringe, and the surplus solution in the syringe must be expelled before performing the intravitreal injection. In contrast to the vials or pre-filled syringes of other VEGF inhibitors for intravitreal use, the need to expel the surplus volume before giving the injection is not stated on the box of Vabysmo°. The absence of this warning exposes patients to a risk of overdose and increased intraocular pressure.

Fintepla° oral solution (***fenfluramine***) - UCB Pharma (*Prescrire Int* n° 263)

The amphetamine *fenfluramine* (Fintepla°) is authorised as a 2.2 mg/ml oral solution for use in children with certain severe forms of epilepsy. It is administered using an oral syringe graduated in millilitres. The box of Fintepla° contains 2 green 3-ml syringes with 0.1-ml graduations from 0 ml to 3 ml, and 2 purple 6-ml syringes with 0.2-ml graduations between 3 ml and 6 ml. The doses are expressed in mg/kg/day in the SmPC for Fintepla°. The SmPC does not include a conversion table showing the volume in millilitres to administer at each of the twice-daily doses. It simply gives two examples of conversions in the dosage tables, corresponding to the maximum recommended doses, e.g. "*13 mg twice daily i.e. 6.0 ml twice daily*". The patient leaflet is no more explicit on this point, simply stating "*You will be told how many ml to take for each dose*". A further risk of wrong-dose errors is created by the presence of 2 syringes of different capacities.

Tepkinly° solution for injection (***epcoritamab***) - AbbVie (*Prescrire Int* n° 268)

Epcoritamab (Tepkinly°), authorised in certain diffuse B-cell lymphomas, is supplied as a concentrate for solution for injection (dose strength 4 mg/0.8 ml) or as a ready-to-use solution for injection (dose strength 48 mg/0.8 ml). The 4 mg/0.8 ml concentrate is used to prepare the first 2 weekly injections. The 48 mg/0.8 ml solution is used for subsequent injections. The concentrate is diluted twice for the first dose and once for the second dose. 1 or 2 empty vials are required for the dilution steps, which are not supplied in the box of Tepkinly°. This product has several features that increase the risk of wrong-dose errors: the unusual preparation method, the need to dilute the solution once or twice for some doses but not for others, resemblance between the 2 dose strengths expressed on the boxes, and the fact that the volume of solution present is not stated on the box of the 48-mg dose strength.

Miscellaneous: an unsuitable dosing device; insufficiently addressed preparation and handling errors; and a paediatric indication for which no usable presentation is available

Amisulpride Stragen° oral solution (***amisulpride***) - Stragen (*Rev Prescrire* n° 486) (French authorisation)
Eligard° powder and solvent for solution for injection (***leuprorelin***) - Bouchara-Recordati (*Rev Prescrire* n° 490) (French authorisation)
Fragmine° 2500 IU (of anti-factor Xa activity)/0.2 ml solution for injection in pre-filled syringes (***dalteparin***) - Pfizer (*Rev Prescrire* n° 487) (French authorisation)

► Excerpt from *Rev Prescrire* February 2025
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2024 Prescrire Information Awards

Prescrire's annual Information Awards are based on the quality of the documentation and information provided by pharmaceutical companies in response to requests by Prescrire's Editorial Staff. We use this documentation when preparing the articles published in the Marketing Authorisations section of our French edition. Prescrire's Information Awards reflect the level of transparency that companies have shown towards Prescrire over the year.

What information does Prescrire request from pharmaceutical companies, and why? In addition to the information Prescrire gathers through a systematic search of various resources, such as health authorities and the scientific literature, we systematically ask pharmaceutical companies to send us data on their products, from the drug development stage through to post-marketing surveillance.

We primarily ask for data on efficacy and adverse effects, packaging items for the products in question, the conditions and restrictions under which patients can access the drugs, their reimbursement status in France, their availability and, where applicable, the reasons for market withdrawal.

The purpose of these requests is to provide healthcare professionals with information about drugs that is as up-to-date and comprehensive as possible, in order to promote the correct use of drugs and help ensure patient safety.

As in previous years, more companies received a Red Card than made the Honours List. 7 of the 91 pharmaceutical companies from which Prescrire requested information earned a place on the 2024 Information Awards Honours List, for providing detailed documentation that addressed every aspect of our requests. Two of them, Ever Pharma and Rhythm Pharmaceuticals, were rated as "Outstanding" for their rapid response times and the provision of particularly useful information and documents that were not publicly available, such as:

– A clinical study report, providing details about the trial protocol and results;
– Documentation submitted to the French National Authority for Health (HAS) to request eligibility for reimbursement through the national health insurance system or approval for use in hospitals;
– Excerpts from the marketing authorisation application;
– Information about supply and availability;
– Packaging items.

Conversely, 15 pharmaceutical companies chose not to provide Prescrire with information or documentation. These companies received an information "Red Card" (see figure). Some of them made it clear that they had no intention of fulfilling our request, by telling us directly or referring us to the health authorities.

Sending unpublished data to Prescrire. Prescrire analyses all the information that pharmaceutical companies send us. The most useful elements are those that are not publicly available elsewhere, such as the clinical data and information not reported in the public assessment reports published by health authorities, and all the very recent data held initially by pharmaceutical companies. Clinical evaluation data are not confidential. Pharmaceutical companies have a duty to provide medical information, and this includes a responsibility to share clinical data.

Still too little transparency in 2024. When pharmaceutical companies refuse to share the useful data in their possession with Prescrire – data that cannot be obtained elsewhere – they do a disservice to healthcare professionals and patients. Unfortunately, as in previous years, this was the case with many companies in 2024. Let us honour those who embrace transparency and help to better inform the healthcare professionals who subscribe to *Prescrire*, for the benefit of patients.

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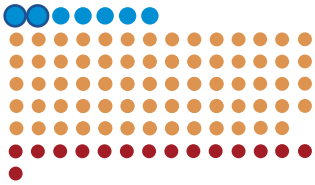
Prescrire Information Awards

Of the 91 companies we contacted for information



- **7 companies made the Honours List**
- **69 companies not on the Honours List not given a Red Card**
- **15 companies given a Red Card**

Honours List

Outstanding:
Ever Pharma, Rhythm Pharmaceuticals

Followed by:
Bioprojet Pharma, Cevidra, EG Labo, Sandoz, Viatris

Red Cards

Alexion, Bayer Healthcare, Dr Falk, Fresenius Kabi, Gedeon Richter, Genzyme Biotherapeutics, Grifols, Incyte Biosciences, Intsel Chimos, Janssen Cilag, Menarini, MSD, Sanofi Aventis, Teva Santé, Zentiva