New drugs and indications in 2012

Outlook

Prescrire’s ratings of new products and indications over the last 10 years (a)

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<td>7</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>15 (e)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>104</td>
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(a) The previous years’ results (1998 to 2002) can be found in Prescrire Int n° 64. This table lists new product (other than generics) and new indications (including unauthorised indications) proposed in France by drug companies to doctors and pharmacists, for use in hospitals or the community; and, as of 2005, line extensions (new dose strengths, new formulations and presentations of existing drugs and products for self-medication, rated in our French edition, la revue Prescrire. A given product is counted several times if it received different ratings in different indications.

b- The drug was: becaplermin in chronic ulcer (Prescrire Int n° 126).
c- The drugs were:
  – abacavir in chronic hepatitis C (Prescrire Int n° 126);
  – telaprevir in chronic hepatitis C (Prescrire Int n° 126).
  Including two jointly marketed products.
d- Including two jointly marketed products.
e- The drugs were:
  – abiraterone in prostate cancer after failure of other treatments (Prescrire Int n° 113).
  – diethylstilbestrol in female reproductive disorders (Prescrire Int n° 134).
  – rivastigmine in Alzheimer’s disease (Prescrire Int n° 134).
  – imatinib in chronic myeloid leukaemia (Prescrire Int n° 135) (a)
  – dabigatran in atrial fibrillation (Prescrire Int n° 137).
f- The drugs were:
  – vorapaxar in atherothrombosis (Prescrire Int n° 127).
  – pirfenidone in idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (Prescrire Int n° 127).

Little publicity surrounding drug safety withdrawals. While new drugs are often announced amid much fanfare, market withdrawals tend to receive little publicity.

Pharmaceutical companies and drug regulatory agencies sometimes present patients and healthcare professionals with a fait accompli. In 2012, some products that are still quite useful were withdrawn for economic reasons, including:

- injectable fusidic acid, one option in certain staphylococcal infections (Rev Prescrire n° 347); and lepirudin, which was an alternative to danaparoid before market release of argatroban (Rev Prescrire n° 348). On occasion, healthcare professionals and patients even have to fight to keep a product on the market, as was the case for Phosphoneuros®, an oral solution containing phosphate, which is useful for certain children with hypophosphataemic rickets (Rev Prescrire n° 348).

A few measures to protect patients

One key responsibility of governmental agencies is to protect patients. They have a number of measures at their disposal to oversee and regulate the pharmaceutical market, in order to ensure that patients are not exposed to unnecessary risks.

Market withdrawal, MA rejection, MA revocation: too rare. Market withdrawal and the revocation, restriction or rejection of a drug’s marketing authorisation (MA) are effective measures for protecting patients, but are still too rarely used.

A few decisions were taken in 2012 that reflect a trend towards patient protection: suppositories containing terpenes were contraindicated in children under 30 months of age, due to the risk of seizures (Rev Prescrire n° 340); the neuroleptic metoclopramide, which is approved to relieve nausea and vomiting, was contraindicated in children due to its disproportionate neurological adverse effects, and a metoclopramide oral solution for infants and children was subsequently withdrawn from the French market (Rev Prescrire n° 345 and 340).

In 2012, Prescrire welcomed a few unfavourable opinions issued by the European Medicines Agency’s (EMA) Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP), concerning: naproxen, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug that exposes patients to disturbing risks of hypotension and hepatotoxicity (Prescrire Int n° 129); and sodium oxybate in fibromyalgia, which provokes major dose-dependent neuropsychiatric adverse effects (Prescrire Int n° 133).

The French Transparency Committee fulfilling its role. In France, the National Authority for Health’s (HAS) Transparency Committee is responsible for evaluating the therapeutic benefit (Service Médical Rendu) of drugs, especially those for which pharmaceutical companies have applied for reimbursement by the national health insurance system or approval for use in hospitals. When a product’s therapeutic benefit is deemed “insufficient”, reimbursement must be refused or revoked: a welcome development. But often, it is a stopgap measure that simply reduces the number of patients exposed to a dangerous drug that should not remain on the market.

In 2012, reimbursement for several drugs with unacceptable risks was revoked, including: certain combinations of vasodilators used as decongestants, but not naproxen + prednisolone (Rev Prescrire n° 350); dronedarone in atrial fibrillation; beta-alanine in hot flushes associated with menopause; ropinirole in restless legs syndrome; trimetazidine in angina and various sensory disturbances; and “vasodilators” in age-related neurosensory cognitive deficits (Rev Prescrire n° 339, 342, 345 and 348).

Information about the risks of drugs: easily missed. Apart from a few announcements issued by health authorities, new information published by regulatory agencies about the risks of