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Facing obstacles, yet doing one's job properly

● **A number of stakeholders are daring to do the right thing.**

"*Do your job, fulfil the role that society expects of you, and receive the appropriate rewards.*" This simple formula for professional accomplishment seems self-evident, especially for healthcare professionals, whose work is subject to many ethical challenges.

Of course, things are not always straightforward in practice. The reality is that there are many obstacles to overcome in day-to-day practice, and not all healthcare professionals make the necessary effort.

This is clear from surveys on clinical practice such as those conducted as part of *Prescrire*'s Professional Practice Improvement Programme. It's not always easy to advise a patient to discontinue treatment that has a negative risk-benefit balance when it has been prescribed by a colleague taken in by the company's sales pitch. It's not always easy to refuse to sell an over-the-counter medicine that is ineffective or unnecessarily risky, when one's job, or the pharmacy's very existence, depends on such sales. And it's not always easy to tell a patient who requests a highly publicised screening test that the data in fact show that it has no real benefit. Yet, the truth is many healthcare professionals do refuse to remain silent, and derive the satisfaction that comes from "doing the right thing".

It's not always easy, day in and day out, to listen carefully to patients' spontaneous complaints that might reveal adverse drug effects, then to research and verify them and, if necessary, report them to a pharmacovigilance centre. Yet many diligent healthcare professionals do exactly that. Others help to identify rare but severe adverse effects and make sure this information is provided to the public (see the case of *benfluorex* (Mediator°) *Prescrire Int* n° 112). As illustrated by several presentations at the French annual pharmacovigilance conference, many small teams with limited means do all they can to make treatments safer (see in a coming issue).

In France, many pharmacists are dedicated to acting in patients' best interests, despite the many economic pressures imposed on their profession. In Switzerland, community pharmacists ensure that the quality and usefulness of their work is widely recognised.

Regulatory agencies should be duty-bound to refuse to allow marketing of drugs that carry unjustifiable risks, and to refuse their reimbursement by national health insurance programmes. It is not always easy for them to resist the massive pressures to which they are subjected, yet some regulatory agencies manage to make courageous decisions, even if a little belatedly (see the case of *rosiglitazone*).

In fact, more and more healthcare professionals are daring to do the right thing, thereby encouraging their colleagues to follow suit.

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