

Medical schools and conflicts of interest

Studies have shown that many medical students believe they are immune to the influence of marketing by the pharmaceutical industry (1). This misconception shows the value of training future healthcare professionals to see through marketing strategies (1). Another measure for schools that teach and train these students is adopting policies for the prevention of conflicts of interest.

In the United States, the American Medical Student Association (AMSA) produces an annual "Scorecard", which ranks medical schools on the basis of the measures taken to teach students about conflicts of interest between the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry (2).

In 2017, a similar and welcome initiative was launched in France (3). Inspired by the AMSA Scorecard and a similar initiative in Canada, the non-profit organisation Formindep, with the support of the French National Medical Students' Association, ANEMF, compiled the first table ranking French medical schools on their conflict-of-interest policies (3).

Thirteen criteria were established, such as the medical school's policy on gifts, various links between lecturers and companies, visits by sales representatives, industry funding of activities or premises. Each criterion was graded from 0 (no policy or a permissive policy) to 2. The global score for each medical school could therefore range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 26 (3).

Only 9 of the 37 medical schools (24%) had introduced initiatives for preventing or managing conflicts of interest with pharmaceutical companies. The medical schools that obtained the highest scores were Lyon Est (with only 5 points out of a possible 26), and Angers (4 points) (3).

The study's authors hope to see a marked improvement in the next ranking of medical schools in France, as occurred in the US following the introduction of the AMSA Scorecard.

Medical schools are where students learn good habits and acquire the basic knowledge needed to practise as healthcare professionals. This ranking of French medical schools is a challenge to do better in the future.

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1- Prescrire Rédaction "Influence des firmes: s'en prémunir dès l'université" *Rev Prescrire* 2013; **33** (353): 221.

2- Prescrire Rédaction "États-Unis: moins de firmes dans les facultés de médecine grâce aux étudiants" *Rev Prescrire* 2016; **36** (387): 58-64.

3- Scheffer P et al. "Conflict of interest policies at French medical schools: starting from the bottom" *PLoS One* 2017; **12** (1): e0168258: 13 pages.