

Independence of French medical schools: clear shortcomings

● **Investigation by a nonprofit organisation revealed poor application of a charter signed by deans of French medical and dental schools.**

In 2017, the Council of Deans of Medical and Dental Schools in France adopted an ethics and professional code of conduct charter, with a view which was intended, in particular, to preserve the scientific integrity of teaching, in the face of frequent commercial influence (a)(1). Formindep, a non-profit association advocating for the independence of medical education and information, investigated whether the 37 French medical schools had adopted this charter, and if so, how they were applying it (2).

Eighteen criteria used to score medical schools. The Formindep questionnaire was based on 18 main criteria relating to the charter, scored from 0 to 2 according to the extent to which they were being applied. These included: complete adoption of the charter, creation of a position responsible for ensuring scientific integrity, examination of complementary university activities, courses on scientific integrity and conflicts of interest, presentation of drugs under their International Non-proprietary Name (INN), and introduction of measures to ensure financial transparency and to combat the practice of giving gifts and other benefits to students. The data were mainly collected by student organisations, including the National Association of French Medical Students (Anemf), the joint independent national trade union representing interns in general medicine (Isnar-IMG), and the trade union representing general medicine interns in Paris (SRP-IMG) (2).

Disappointing results, but a few advances. Among the 28 schools that had adopted the charter, only one received a higher than average score: Tours (with a score of 20/36). The majority of schools were

not applying several measures recommended by the charter, for example the continued presence of industry representatives on school boards, lack of financial transparency, and failure of faculty members to declare their conflicts of interest (2,3).

One of the explanations given for these disappointing results stems from the fact that the professional ethics committee meant to implement the charter only existed in one out of three schools (2). However, this survey did reveal some positive initiatives. For example, the Lyon-Est and Toulouse-Rangueil schools declared that they were free of any industry funding, whereas many schools considered this to be impossible (4). Let us hope that students, academics and deans will look at these data and use them to make their schools more independent.

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a-The President of the French Council of Deans of Pharmacy Schools also announced the adoption of a charter in 2019 (ref 5).

Selected references from Prescrire's literature search

- 1- Conférences nationales des Doyens des facultés de médecine et des facultés d'odontologie "Charte éthique et déontologique des Facultés de médecine et d'odontologie" *Rev Prescrire* 2018; **38** (412): 150-151.
- 2- "Classement 2018 des facultés françaises en matière d'indépendance". facs2018.formindep.fr accessed 18 March 2019: 9 pages.
- 3- Pandélé Y "Indépendance des facs vis-à-vis de l'industrie : continuez, ça vient !" *What's up doc?* 1 February 2019: 1 page.
- 4- Cousin S "Indépendance des facs de médecine: des progrès mais peut mieux faire !" 8 February 2019. www.remede.org accessed 16 April 2019: 1 page.
- 5- Béguin F and Stromboni C "Conflits d'intérêts: les facultés de médecine peuvent mieux faire" *Le Monde* 29 January 2019: 10.

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