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## The time factor

Three main factors influence the treatment decisions of patients and healthcare professionals. The first factor is data from evaluations, with their inherent limitations. The second is practical considerations specific to each clinical situation. And the third is the touch of irrationality and subjectivity that patient and healthcare professional alike bring to the decision-making process. Both parties need to be conscious of these three factors and clearly distinguish their role in treatment decisions.

The effects of time on each of these three factors, these three influences on the decision-making process, should also be taken into consideration.

Over time, the results of clinical trials are either supported or challenged. Over time, uncertainties are clarified. Over time, careful decisions, made first and foremost in the interest of patients, are vindicated.

Over time, patients grow to trust healthcare professionals who make the effort to listen carefully, provide reliable information and high-quality care, day after day. Or, on the other hand, over time, patients lose confidence in healthcare professionals who make decisions based on biased, commercially driven information. And the general public loses confidence in the organisations that are supposed to safeguard their health.

And over time, people accumulate knowledge based on their experiences, which either rein-

forces their beliefs or leads them to change directions.

And there comes a time when the public realises what's really at stake in health policy.

Every day, in France, healthcare professionals help patients come to shared decisions, without giving in to the siren call of big business. Some may have been taken aback by the media frenzy over France's "Mediator° scandal", involving *benfluorex*, in late 2010. They may have been glad, and encouraged, to see how, in early 2011, media attention highlighted *Prescrire's* methodical work, carried out over time, and leading to concrete proposals in favour of better patient care, including withdrawal of this or that drug from the market, going well beyond the Mediator° case.

More than ever, time has shown the importance of rational decision-making, perseverance and determination. Time has highlighted the need for health professionals to seek independent sources of information and to share the decision-making process with well-informed patients. It is important for insurance companies and manufacturers also to realise that their long-term interests depend on the quality of their services and products. Similarly, policy makers also need to continue to put patients' interests first.

**Prescrire**