No Packaging Award
in 2015

Prescrire’s systematic reviews in the New Products section include evaluation of the drugs’ packaging. Is it clear from the labelling which active substance or substances the product contains? How are doses prepared and administered? Does the information in the patient leaflet help users avoid errors and dangers?

When analysing a drug’s packaging, including the patient leaflet, and how convenient it is to use, we take into account every aspect of the context in which it is used: the clinical situation; the patients concerned, in particular children, pregnant women and elderly patients; and the setting in which it will be obtained, prepared and administered (in hospital, with the intervention of a nurse, or in the community, either prescribed by a doctor, advised by a community pharmacist, or bought by the patient from a pharmacy or an Internet retailer).

Every aspect of the packaging is examined to determine its quality and safety (clarity, accuracy, suitability to the situation). Is the drug supplied in a multidose container or is each dose packaged individually? What measures have been taken to protect children from poisoning? We examine: the information on the labelling that is useful for patient care, including the legibility of international nonproprietary

Dangerous shortcomings in the information provided in the labelling or patient leaflet

- Doli État Grippal® powder and solvent for suspension for injection (paracetamol + pheniramine + vitamin C) Sanofi Aventis (Rev Prescrire n° 375) “Doli” is printed in large, bold characters on the box, as it is on the boxes of all the products of the Doli® umbrella brand. This can lead to confusion between the products, some of which contain different active ingredients, such as the dangerous vasoconstrictor, pseudoephedrine. The INNs paracetamol and pheniramine are much less obvious than “Doli”.
- Antalcalm® medicated plasters (diclofenac) Pierre Fabre Médicament (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Asprofash® tablets (acetylsalicylic acid) Bayer Healthcare (Consumer Care division) (Rev Prescrire n° 381)
- Opalgyne® vaginal solution (benzydamine) Innotech International (Rev Prescrire n° 375) The patient leaflets of these products contain insufficient information about the harms of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) during pregnancy. They fail to warn patients about concerns that NSAIDs may provoke spontaneous abortion and malformations when taken during the first trimester of pregnancy, or about the sometimes irreversible renal damage or pulmonary arterial hypertension reported in children following exposure to an NSAID during the second trimester. These leaflets only state that the product concerned is contraindicated from the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy. It would be better to avoid NSAIDs throughout pregnancy until the patient uses the sixth month of pregnancy has been proven harmless.
- Colpotrophine® vaginal cream and capsules (promestriene) Teva Santé (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Gydrelle® vaginal cream (estriol) Iprad Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Physio-gyne® vaginal cream and pessaries (estriol) H.A.C. Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 383) • Trophicrème® vaginal cream (estriol) Sanofi Aventis (Rev Prescrire n° 383) The patient leaflets of these products contain insufficient information about the long-term harms of vaginal oestrogens, which are identical in nature to those of oral oestrogen therapy: arterial and venous thrombosis, as well as breast and endometrial cancer.

Packaging liable to cause dangerous dose preparation errors

- Vaccin BCG SSI® powder and solvent for suspension for injection (BCG) Sanofi Pasteur MSD (Rev Prescrire n° 385)
names (INNs) and the dose strength; information presented graphically, such as dosing schedules and pictograms; any devices provided for preparing or administering the required dose; the quality and clarity of the information provided in the patient leaflet on how to prepare the doses to be administered, on adverse effects, and on the situations and patient groups in which the drug poses a risk.

The Packaging Awards are based on the assessments conducted by Prescrire’s Packaging Working Group, in total independence, free from any influence from packaging manufacturers.

No Award in 2015, but various dangers to report. None of the packaging examined in 2015 satisfied all the requirements concerning safety and therapeutic advance to earn a Prescrire Packaging Award. However, the dangers identified are illustrated in this year’s edition by the 20 or so products that received a Red or Yellow Card: some lack a child-proof cap, others provide no means of preparing doses for children, some patient leaflets fail to warn users of known dangers.

A non-exhaustive list of packaging flaws. Increasing numbers of drugs are placed on the market in packaging that could lead to difficulty or poorly evaluated dangers, for example:

- Cancer drugs such as cytotoxic agents, in bulk bottles; insulins marketed at different concentrations; and the continued growth of umbrella brands.

- The Information Awards focus on the information provided to Prescrire by pharmaceutical companies concerning safety and therapeutic advance to earn a Prescrire Award. The overall picture is disturbing.

2015 Prescrire Information Awards

The Information Awards focus on the information provided to Prescrire by the companies whose products we examined in the New Products section of our French edition in 2015.

Red cards (in alphabetic order)

Allergan, Bayer Healthcare (Pharmaceuticals), Biogen Idec, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Crinex, Gilead Sciences, Meda Pharma, Menarini, Pfizer

Yellow cards

- Monosept® eye drops in single-dose containers (cethexonium bromide) Horus Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 376)
  The INN is not displayed on the single-dose containers.
- Zovirax® 200 mg/5 ml oral suspension (aciclovir) GlaxoSmithKline (Rev Prescrire n° 386)
  The new dosing device (a double-ended measuring spoon, one end for measuring 2.5 ml and the other 5 ml) is unsuitable and could cause wrong-dose errors, given that the recommended dose is 5 ml or 10 ml.
- Ribavox tablets (ribavirin) Bioprojet Pharma (Rev Prescrire n° 386)
  The boxes and bottles are covered with fanciful graphics (a tablet depicted as a rocket, clouds and the sun) that increase the resemblance between the three dose strengths and could lead to confusion when dispensing them or preparing doses.

Pharmaceutical companies hold a wealth of information on the drugs they market or withdraw from the market. They have a responsibility to share this information, in part to help ensure that their drugs are used appropriately and to protect patients from certain risks.

As part of its systematic literature search, Prescrire requests clinical data, packaging, and administrative and regulatory information from drug companies, then compares them with information obtained from other sources. Prescrire’s Information Awards reflect how each company assumes this responsibility to share information.

Still too little transparency on the part of drug companies in 2015. On the whole, pharmaceutical companies supply Prescrire with a lot of information, some new and some that we have obtained elsewhere. But they are less cooperative when asked to provide relevant, detailed documentation containing unpublished data, which for example could include details about adverse effects.

Some companies choose to be transparent. These companies are placed on the Honours List. And those rated as “Outstanding” provided us with useful, detailed data without delay and sometimes without being asked.

Other companies fail to respond to some or all of our requests for information, or provide only limited data. Some of them delay their response, then fail to provide usable information. Some omit the most important data. Red Cards are given to highlight persistent shortcomings in the provision of information by certain drug companies.

In 2015, few pharmaceutical companies embraced transparency by agreeing to share with health professionals all the data they hold, in particular data on adverse effects.