

A campaign to use International Nonproprietary Names

“It’s great to be rid of trade names once and for all! (...) Independence rules! It took time and energy, but I’m not going back”. An increasing number of prescribers are rebelling against prescription assistance software that forces them to use trade names.

Thinking in terms of international nonproprietary names (INNs) means thinking in terms of the “best choice” in pharmacology, therapeutic class, risk-benefit balance, interactions and cost-effectiveness. It also means knowing exactly what one is prescribing, dispensing, recommending or administering, and – for the patient – what is in the family medicine cabinet.

The INN is another means of providing patients with sound, honest information, of explaining why a specific drug treatment has been chosen, and any monitoring that is needed.

Use of the INN strengthens the doctor (or pharmacist)-patient relationship, helping patients to feel more involved in their treatment. Hence the importance of the public campaign entitled “The INN, a drug’s real name” that was launched in France last October by several organisations (a). If patients recognize the real name of a drug they are taking, they are more likely to be able to use that medicine

correctly and to avoid adverse effects, especially those due to overdose, interactions, or administration errors.

It will take more than a few months for the INN system to be widely adopted, and it will take determination, patience and persuasion, especially in the doctor’s office and the pharmacy. Prescriptions should be written and explained using the INN (the trade name can also be mentioned if necessary), and the INN should be highlighted on drug packaging.

Prescrire calls on all its readers and subscribers, whether or not they are health professionals, to spread this message. The INN must supersede the trade name. It makes things clearer for everyone, helps to rationalise drug use, reduces waste, and prevents confusion and accidents. In short, it promotes better treatment.

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a- Association Mieux Prescrire (AMP), Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité Française (FNMF), Union Fédérale des Consommateurs (CFU) Que Choisir, and the Medicines in Europe Forum.