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Enough is enough!

It is normal for companies that manufacture or sell drugs and healthcare products to protect their market share. However, the strategies they employ sometimes include enlisting the services of opinion leaders to promote their products. It is also to be expected that some opinion leaders will be tempted to take on the role of opinion dealers who use and abuse their power to boost their egos or bank accounts, discrediting themselves in the process.

In contrast, what is entirely unacceptable is that a publicly funded organisation should jeopardise the safety of the population, or a section of the population, by raising unfounded specialist opinions to the status of national guidelines. Yet this is precisely what France's National Authority for Health (HAS) persists in doing.

After analysing clinical practice guidelines published by HAS since 2007, we call on French healthcare professionals and patients to make it clear that enough is enough! The masquerade has lasted far too long.

Was it due to hypocrisy, to weaknesses, or perhaps to compromise? The reasons are not important: what is needed now are a clear vision and concrete objectives, tasks and responsibilities for the development and implementation of practice guidelines for healthcare professionals.

It is high time the authorities stopped polishing their image and started to pay more attention to the basics. In other words, HAS must no longer merely pay lip service to methodological quality and transparency. Above all, HAS must refocus its mission on the fundamental duty facing all healthcare stakeholders: to improve the health and well-being of patients. It is not enough merely to "do no harm".

HAS is now planning to subcontract out the development of clinical practice guidelines, and to endorse and distribute those guidelines that meet a fixed set of quality criteria. But first, HAS should apply these criteria to its own activities.

There remains the problem of the questionable guidelines that have already been published. When a drug puts patients at risk, despite professionals' best efforts to limit the damage, responsible regulatory agencies withdraw it from the market. Similarly, HAS must withdraw all clinical practice guidelines it has produced or approved that put patients at risk. The public has a right to expect a much higher standard from HAS. Enough is enough!

Prescrire

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