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Our ratings on a new drug's therapeutic advantage

Since its creation 30 years ago, *Prescrire* has used a rating system to provide an at-a-glance estimate of the therapeutic progress (or lack thereof) of the new drugs and indications analysed each month. A pictogram represents *Prescrire's* mascot, nicknamed Gaspard. Gaspard's different facial expressions and body positions correspond to seven pre-defined ratings. *Prescrire's* at-a-glance rating system for new drugs and new indications is explained on the last page of the "New Products" section (this issue p 68). It also forms the basis for the yearly Drug Awards (Pilule d'Or) ceremony in January (this issue pages 79-82 and online at www.english.prescrire.org). For example, "Nothing new" indicates that the product has no proven advantages over other drugs belonging to the same, plethoric pharmacological class. Many such products are simple me-toos.

What matters is therapeutic progress

Drug regulatory agencies do not require manufacturers to prove that their new products represent a therapeutic advance before granting marketing authorisation. Yet therapeutic progress is precisely what matters to patients, and this is why *Prescrire* examines each new drug's place compared with existing options.

Prescrire's standardised method for assessing pharmaceuticals is a multistep process: we first examine the condition or clinical setting for which the drug is proposed; then the natural course of the disease, the efficacy and safety of existing treatments, and the most relevant outcome measures. This is followed by a systematic search for clinical data on the efficacy and adverse effects of the new drug, and an assessment of the level of evidence.

Gaspard sums up *Prescrire's* review of the evidence

Based on our independent analysis of clinical data, we form a judgement as to whether or not the new drug is beneficial for patients or whether or not its harmful effects outweigh the benefit. Gaspard's demeanor informs our readers, at a glance, of the conclusion of our assessment based on extensive, painstaking work by a large multidisciplinary team. This allows patients and healthcare professionals to distinguish useful new products from those that are simply useless or, worse, downright dangerous, based on hard endpoints.

Prescrire's conclusions, represented in these ratings, are often in line with those of other independent teams worldwide.

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