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The key is in the name

The brand names for Striverdi^o and Relvar^o mentioned in this issue on pages 94 and 95 are not informative.

If you turn to the inset on page 92, titled “Common stem: *-terol*”, you will find a key to understanding these drugs. Indeed, international nonproprietary names (INNs) ending in the common stem *-terol* indicate that the active substance is a bronchodilator that achieves this effect by stimulating beta-2 adrenoceptors.

Hiding behind the above-mentioned brand names are several INNs containing the common stem *-terol*: *olodaterol* and a fixed-dose combination containing *vilanterol*. This information alone makes it unlikely that these products are truly novel or represent a significant advance over existing treatments. Evaluation data confirms this suspicion.

Brand names are sometimes easy to remember, because their primary purpose is to facilitate sales, marketing and market penetration. INNs have a completely different purpose, which is to convey useful information about the drug’s mechanism of action or its pharmacotherapeutic group. They are an aid to communication and help health professionals and patients to recognise a treatment’s role in certain effects and to avoid duplicate therapy. Learning to understand common stems and using INNs when thinking about, talking about and prescribing drugs is far more useful than memorising brand names. It’s a good habit to acquire, in the public interest.

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