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Common property

From the beginning one key preoccupation of *Prescrire's* staff was to protect the organisation and its publications from all negative influences: not only commercial pressures, but also pressure from professional unions, policy makers and for-profit publishers.

Thus protected from these negative influences, *Prescrire* has been able to operate in total freedom and independence, with the necessary means to produce and distribute reliable comparative information capable of improving health-care professionals' daily practice, and the quality of care that patients receive.

For the last 14 years, *Prescrire* has been funded entirely by its subscribers, and only by its subscribers: that means no advertising, no sponsors, no government subsidies, and no involvement of financial groups or private publishers. Our subscribers have succeeded in self-funding their journal and information sources. They are justifiably proud of this achievement, built around a common vision, rallying around the banner of quality and independence.

Some motivated subscribers have chosen to become active members of *Association Mieux Prescrire* (AMP), the non-profit organization

responsible for producing all of *Prescrire's* publications and services. Regular elections are held to constitute the "Readers' Group" (see the *AMP* Statutes on the *Prescrire* website at www.prescrire.org). Thanks to their subscriptions, advice, and constructive criticism, *Prescrire's* subscribers actively contribute to the ongoing development of continuous training materials of exceptional quality and relevance.

The entire organisation belongs to its subscribers, and they are fully aware of their collective strength: they sponsor new subscribers, promote the journal to students, and encourage colleagues who read over their shoulders to obtain individual subscriptions.

The stakes are high. The influence of this professional movement, and its ability to promote high-quality healthcare, depends largely on its financial viability. In the case of *Prescrire*, it is the subscribers, and the subscribers alone, who provide these financial means.

Prescrire is the precious common property of its subscribers and its staff. It is theirs and theirs alone. *Prescrire's* future couldn't be in better hands!

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Health Action International (HAI), International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB), Association Internationale de la Mutualité (AIM), The European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC) and Medicines in Europe Forum launched a Joint Declaration on 'Relevant Health Information for Empowered Citizens' on 3 October 2006. The Declaration is attached to this December 2006 issue, and is also available at www.isdbweb.org

The Declaration warns against an initiative by the European Commission's Pharmaceutical Forum that would make direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) lawful in the EU.

Strangely this time DTCA masquerades as 'a human rights to have access to information on medicines'. But the aim of the European Commission and its Pharmaceutical Forum is actually to support EU pharma companies and ultimately remove the ban on DTCA.

The public do not need information on medicines that is directly or indirectly supported by drug companies, simply because such information cannot be comparative.

The Joint Declaration shows there is no lack of comparative, reliable and user-friendly information on therapeutics for patients and the public in EU countries. It calls on EU institutions and Member States to support these relevant sources of health information.

The ban on DTCA in the EU must be maintained and applied strictly, be it on advertising proper or 'information' on medicines and diseases that is supported by drug companies.