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Going against the flow

Month after month, new drugs flood the market, borne on a tide of media and stock market announcements focusing attention on their novelty. And regardless of any real therapeutic progress – or, too often, lack thereof.

In this primarily market-driven strategy, there is no need for drug companies to develop drugs that provide true therapeutic progress. Me-too drugs proliferate freely, despite not having been designed to be more effective or less dangerous than drugs already on the market. Who cares about the risks taken in the absence of any progress? Or whether this strategy drives up healthcare costs, thus reducing patients' access to health care?

Why bother investing time and expertise in designing suitable packaging or making an effort to protect and inform patients? All that is needed is to think up a brand name for the drug and to satisfy the minimum regulatory requirements.

Why worry about the consequences of withholding information about the use of the drug? Playing the “trade secrecy” card will suffice.

Many people within the pharmaceutical industry just go with the flow, focusing mainly on short-term profitability for the minimum investment, with no real ambition to provide therapeutic progress.

Fortunately, others go against the flow.

In 2012, a few pharmaceutical companies succeeded in providing tangible progress for patients (see page 79 of this issue). In some patients with hepatitis C, *boceprevir* increases the chances of achieving and sustaining undetectable levels of genotype 1 virus: a first step. In patients with metastatic prostate cancer and no further treatment options, *abiraterone* prolongs survival by a few months. These advances are accompanied by adverse effects that are not always acceptable. Patients and healthcare professionals need to be fully aware of the potential benefits and harms in order to make an informed decision.

In 2012, some teams in the pharmaceutical industry recognised that they have a responsibility to provide transparent, high-quality information to health professionals who rely on *Prescrire's* analyses, because it contributes to appropriate drug use.

In 2012, drugs without any packaging flaws were still far too rare. Yet all the components required for high-quality, safe packaging are known and available.

Prescrire would like to honour the women and men in the pharmaceutical industry who do not just go with the flow and who refuse to be satisfied with mediocrity. The *Prescrire* Awards reflect our high standards. Those who are granted an award deserve extra credit for standing firm.

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