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Rational choices

The results of our latest annual review of new drugs and indications have a wide range of implications (see *Prescrire International* April 2007 on page 80).

For instance, they suggest that the current system of financing of pharmaceutical research, in which R&D is conducted solely by drug companies beholden to their shareholders, is running out of steam. It no longer generates many products providing real benefit to patients.

Regulators and health authorities, represented by the European Medicines Agency and national regulatory agencies are, in theory, responsible for regulating the pharmaceuticals market in the interests of public health. Yet they currently seem more preoccupied with the financial health of the most influential drug companies, having forsaken their original mandate in healthcare regulation.

In France, the current political administration is imposing suicidal economic conditions on social security institutions. The very high prices granted for new drugs bear little if any relation to the costs of development, manufacture and distribution, or to evidence of therapeutic advantages.

For their part, healthcare professionals will no doubt focus on the list of new products that will

provide a tangible benefit to some of their patients. Unfortunately the list is not very long – a couple of dozen products this year, as usual.

Only a small number of common drugs are necessary to ensure high-quality medical, pharmaceutical or dental care. Each practitioner must choose among the different options, independently, methodically, on the basis of strict criteria. These include: the expected tangible benefits, the known and acceptable adverse effects, convenience of use, and relative cost. Once this list of medications has been established, the various products must be studied in detail in order to ensure that patients use them under optimal conditions. The list will remain valid until clinical research convincingly shows that another treatment is better.

This is where *Prescrire* can help. Month after month, the editorial team painstakingly consults all available data sources to determine whether, in a given situation and in comparison with existing options, new drugs have any demonstrated therapeutic advantages.

This enables each individual subscriber to make well-informed choices and provide high quality patient care.

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Attachment

Open letter by HAI, Medicines in Europe Forum and ISDB to EU Commissioners Günter Verheugen and Markos Kyprianou opposing projects to introduce information on health and diseases from pharmaceutical companies.