

No thank you

Some little snacks or a buffet at a discussion on community-hospital relations, a departmental meeting, training session or a care home or pharmacy team meeting? Yes, why not, refreshments can be convenient, convivial and very welcome in the middle of a busy working day. But no thank you, not when a pharmaceutical company is footing the bill, in the interests of “staying in touch with healthcare professionals”. That is how we are insidiously influenced, instead of gathering impartial information on drug treatments. And, in France, accepting this type of freebie would be enough for us to see our names listed as “recipients of benefits from a pharmaceutical company” on the website www.transparence.sante.gouv.fr. But actually, it is easy enough to eat and drink at our own expense and to have the courage simply to say “no thank you” to pharmaceutical companies and their representatives. It can be difficult to make a habit of saying no, but doing so will be a source of great satisfaction.

Being able to say “no thank you” to firms seeking to influence healthcare professionals is crucial to obtaining information and training that prioritises patients’ best interests. It is also crucial when choosing a drug, especially when it does more harm than good and exposes patients to disproportionate risks. However, dozens of such drugs are on the market. Because pharmaceutical companies have been granted marketing authorisations and are allowed to keep promoting them.

As a rule, it takes many years before they are withdrawn (See page 111 of this issue). Years during which we are authorised to prescribe or recommend these drugs, as well as being permitted to accept little gifts from the pharmaceutical companies. But to do so is not beneficial to patients. Even when a patient believes they can trust a particular drug: it simply reinforces their misplaced trust. And it would put us in a bad position as a *de facto* accomplice in the event of an unfortunate outcome for a patient who is adversely affected by the drug.

It is better to pledge to saying “No thank you, we will not begin treatment with this dangerous drug, there are better options”. Pledge also to saying, backed by robust evidence, “No thank you, we are going to discontinue this treatment as it is too dangerous”, before serious problems arise.

Knowing how to say “No thank you” is crucial if healthcare professionals are to do their job well.

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