Take action

Many drugs that have been marketed for decades have become such a part of routine practice that they are taken for granted. Some are useful, with demonstrated efficacy and an acceptable adverse effect profile. Some others have no demonstrated clinical value beyond that of a placebo, and it is debatable whether they should remain on the market.

But there is another category of drugs whose continued presence on the market is unacceptable: drugs that are more dangerous than beneficial, with an adverse effect profile that has worsened over time and is disproportionate given their lack of, or limited, efficacy.

Such drugs include *trimetazidine* (Vastarel° or other brands), which has no proven efficacy in preventing angina, and for which yet another serious adverse effect, drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS), has been identified more than 60 years after its market introduction (see *Prescrire Int* January 2025).

They also include *tianeptine* (Stablon° or other brands) used as an antidepressant, for which a warning was issued in the US in early 2024 concerning cases of abuse resulting in seizures, coma and death (see *Prescrire Int* November 2024). And *pseudoephedrine*, with cerebral vasoconstriction identified as a new serious adverse effect in 2023, on top of its previously described cardiovascular and neurological adverse effects, making its use unjustifiable in a situation as minor as the common cold (see *Prescrire Int* September 2024).

These substances have been included among Prescrire's drugs to avoid since the first edition. The list of their adverse effects has grown longer over time, along with the list of associated warnings. Yet companies persist in selling them for profit, and health authorities either fail to intervene or seem powerless to withdraw them from the market.

In response to this inertia, health professionals can take action by working with patients, informing them and involving them in the decision not to prescribe, represcribe or dispense these drugs.

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