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Just who are we working for?

Just who are we working for? And at the end of the day, whose interests are we defending? In the face of constant pressure from the media, advertising and government, health-care professionals need to stop and ask themselves these questions.

Just who are we working for? Imagine for a few minutes that you are a drug manufacturer. Your overriding concern would be tracking sales performance, developing market share, rapidly obtaining the necessary market authorisations at the lowest possible cost and, thus, increasing profitability.

Back to reality. You are a healthcare professional, paid by your patient-clients (or their representatives) to provide care, advice, perspective, and to distinguish between the useful and the superfluous.

Your overriding concern is to strive for solid, well-founded analysis and recommendations. You have to distinguish between the exaggerated claims or even the outright lies of the industry's advertising on the one hand and, on the other hand, recognise real therapeutic advance.

Nine times out of ten, pharmaceutical "innovations" do not offer a real advantage: they do not help you provide better care for your pa-

tients. But one in ten products provides some additional benefit to patients.

It can be just as harmful to ignore a useful innovation, due to a fear of being wrong, as to abandon an established therapy, to fall for the smoke-and-mirrors of advertising. It is not easy to distinguish what is relevant and useful. Constant critical analysis and investment in solid, well-adapted and independent research materials are needed, such as *Prescrire*'s articles and reference library, in which you have placed your confidence.

Access to independent information is an important safeguard. However, beyond this, the fundamental question that every one of us faces is: just who are we working for, and at the end of the day, whose interests are we defending?

Pressure from the media, advertising and government is so pervasive that we can lose track of the fundamental aim of our profession: to help patients.

It is time to stop and ask ourselves these questions.

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