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Take action!

Adopted after lengthy and heated discussions, European Directive 2004/27/EC on human medicines represents a major step forward when it comes to the transparency of the EU and member state regulatory agencies (go to www.prescrire.org for a full account of the drafting and approval process). Yet in France, transposition of this Directive into national law is selective: policies that benefit drug companies are transposed without delay, while measures intended to improve quality of care and transparency are virtually ignored (see page 115).

Worse, the French government is preparing to legalise “compliance support programmes” sponsored by drug companies (see page 114); these measures are not even addressed in the European directive. They intend to use a fast-track procedure to rush this measure through parliament without proper debate.

It is doubly scandalous that this measure is to be pushed through Parliament without proper scrutiny or the possibility of amendment. The government is effectively throwing patients into the open arms of drug companies, which will then be able to identify and target “non compliant” patients.

This project is part of a movement that started in the United States and is gradually spreading throughout the world. Having little if anything to offer in the way of therapeutic advances, drug companies have been obliged to develop other, albeit less scientific skills, such as: the art of lobbying to reduce regulatory requirements, even when it undermines patient safety; influencing prescribers and academics, through “training sessions”, “partnerships” and “research funding”; and manipulating public opinion by funding “health education” campaigns, often for fabricated disorders. And now they are to be allowed, like Orwellian “thought police”, to ferret out non compliant patients!

The public must be aware of these projects and demand proper scrutiny by their elected representatives.

So-called compliance support programmes, financed and controlled by drug companies, must be banned. And the European Directive must be properly and fully transposed.

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