

Update

10 January 2020

Response to regional daily press articles on conflicts of interest
**A survey that is damaging to the scientific reputation of France
and patients**

This Friday, Leem learned of the simultaneous publication in the regional daily press of several articles critical of the working relationships between doctors in university hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. **Leem strongly condemns this new onslaught against doctors and pharmaceutical companies united in their joint commitment to fighting disease.**

These articles contain no new or exclusive information. They are based on the reports made by the pharmaceutical companies themselves via the Transparence Santé public web portal, which contains full information on the working relationships between companies and healthcare professionals.

Leem regrets that these data may be being used for the sole purpose of fuelling public suspicion. The pharmaceutical companies deplore the fact that the total transparency to which doctors and pharmaceutical companies have given their joint commitment for many years is now being used against them.

No new drugs without scientific collaboration

Leem highlights the fact that the working relationships between university hospitals and pharmaceutical companies are crucial to the development of new drugs and the ability to test them in clinical trials that are expertly supervised and administered by healthcare professionals. Health research involves multiple and varied interactions between those who discover new drugs in either academic or private-sector research, pharmaceutical companies that develop treatments, and the healthcare professionals who prescribe those treatments. These collaborative interactions are openly documented for anyone to read on the Transparence Santé website, and it is these very interactions that have built the reputation of France in therapeutic innovation.

Fuelling suspicion of these relationships risks seriously damaging the reputation of French research excellence and worsening the rate of decline in national competitiveness that Leem has warned of for many years. The impact of these repeated accusations is no longer limited solely to penalising the international scientific appeal of France; they now pose a real threat to patient access to treatment in France. Leem highlights the fact that the number of new industry trials launched by pharmaceutical companies in France is falling by an average of 13% year-on-year. The continued decline in clinical research conducted in France is depriving many patients of early access to innovative drugs.

A tightly regulated and totally public working relationship

Leem points out that no other business sector is subject to as many transparency and compliance obligations as the pharmaceutical industry. Legislation and regulations have been considerably tightened over the last 10 years. As a result, all benefits and compensations above €10 including VAT received by healthcare professionals are published in the public database at www.transparence-sante.gouv.fr.

As Leem has always stressed, this basic scheme could obviously be improved. This website includes highly composite data gathered from different business sectors, and groups together under the generic term of ‘benefits’ a very broad range of information that is open to misinterpretation (not only invitations to scientific or training events, but also accommodation, travel and meal expenses). **Some amounts are projections covering several years (foreseeable contract values), while others reflect actual tax-inclusive payments made by a company during a given half-year period (in the form of compensations).** Using and analysing this data therefore presents a particularly complex challenge.

In 2016, the Conduct and Ethics Committee of the French Association of Pharmaceutical Companies (Codeem) conducted a meticulous analysis of this database, which revealed the complex and cumbersome nature of the reporting system, which itself is a source of data entry and interpretation errors. At that time, Codeem also issued proposals for improving the features of the database and making it easier to use and understand. Despite being submitted to the relevant public authorities, these recommendations have yet to be acted upon. This fact was shared in 2018 by the Léo/Kierzek mission to ‘improving information about drugs for users and healthcare professionals’. In its conclusions, the report pleaded for *“a total overhaul of the database”*.

‘Gifts’ to healthcare professionals have been prohibited for more than 25 years

Lastly, Leem would like to restate that pharmaceutical companies do not make 'gifts' to healthcare professionals. Any breach of this regulation is punishable under criminal law (the DMOS Act of 1993).

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