Recent developments in the domestic French healthcare market at the beginning of 2011 have put media pressure on pharmaceutical companies. This pressure has increased with several striking events in France, including the voluntary resignation of the AFSSAPS director, the legal hearing of Servier pharmaceuticals, the publication of a list of 77 medicines under regulatory monitoring (following market withdrawal of diet adjuvant benfluorex), and planned market authorisation withdrawals. Collectively, these have been critical milestones in the industry's image. The aim of this study was to assess the opinion of the French population on these events and evaluate their impact on consumer behaviour, especially the publication of the surveillance list.

A total of 928 French individuals answered a phone questionnaire in March 2011, giving a 95% level of confidence with a margin of error of ca. 3%.

This questionnaire consisted of 37 closed questions and 3 open-ended questions. Interviewees were aged 30 and over since this age group is expected to be more prone to diseases and chronic pathologies.

The study is compliant with the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) quota methodology about distribution in terms of age, gender and socio-professional categories of interviewed people.

Of the 25.4% people in abeyance:
- 17.9% declared that they would continue their medical treatment but after checking with their doctor;
- 7.5% declared that they would the treatment but reduce the doses.

One in three persons did not intend to change their treatment intake.

Impact of current affairs on the respect of prescription

Treatment compliance was reported at 85.8% pre-surveillance list publication and 83.5% post-surveillance list publication. Liberties taken with the prescription included: purchasing part of the prescription, changing prescribed doses, stopping treatment before the end of the prescription.

Global frame of mind

41.1% interviewees considered that they needed to be reassured on healthcare management.

Impact on drugs purchasing

Among all the interviewees, 17.4% declared considering reducing their medicine purchase patterns as a result of the surveillance list publication:

Among them, 9.9% were going to buy fewer medicines than before the above-mentioned regulatory events and 2.9% were going to buy less Over The Counter (OTC) drugs than before

Consequences of the list publication remains limited: only 19.1% of people who read or just had a look at this list, declared wanting to change their habits (vs 16.7% of people who never read or saw it).

If the recent events have created a suspicion toward the industry, the health professional status has been strengthened in people's mind: as a result, consumer behaviour is strongly affected by product inclusion onto the surveillance list, especially for those patients treated with at least one listed treatment.

French consumer confidence in pharmaceuticals in general is mostly unaffected by the new surveillance list. Furthermore, consumer confidence in healthcare regulators, off-label prescribing and pharmaceutical companies were negatively affected by the benfluorex case. Prescribers will have a pivotal role in maintaining confidence through patient communication and information.

References