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## **50 percent of France's drugs 'useless' – top French doctors**

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"Carte vitale", French health insurance card set next to a jar containing drug capsules and pills. (AFP Photo/Philippe Huguen)

Half of France's drugs are 'useless' and five percent are dangerous, a book by two top French doctors claimed. The duo believes the pharmaceutical industry is forcing ineffective drugs on the market, costing taxpayers up to ten billion euros a year.



The duo reviewed 4,000 French drugs and found that 50 percent were 'useless,' 20 percent were 'badly tolerated' and five percent had adverse effects.

Philippe Even, former head of the Necker Hospital in Paris, and Bernard Debré, doctor and member of parliament for the UMP party, recently co-authored a book titled 'The Guide to 4,000 Useful, Useless or Dangerous Medicines.'

The book claimed that France could save up to ten billion euros a year by halting social security reimbursements for drugs that are hazardous or have no health value.

The pharmaceutical industry is "the most lucrative, most cynical and least ethical of all the industries," Dr. Even said. He claims that in order to reduce budget shortfalls in France's healthcare system, "one simply has to take the dangerous, useless and ineffective medicines off the market."

The book was written in light of a Mediator Affaire report Dr. Even and Dr. Debré conducted in 2011 for former President Nicolas Sarkozy, where they investigated an incident where some 2,000 people were killed by a prescribed diabetic drug before the medicine was taken off the market.

Their report stated that the French medical system was in dire need of reform, spurring Dr. Even and Dr. Debré to write their book.

The two made a list of drugs that pose health risks, including cardiovascular, anti-inflammatory and anti-smoking drugs, and contraceptive pills.

Statins, drugs taken to lower cholesterol, were just one of the many drugs found to be “completely useless,” Dr. Even said in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*. “[Statins] are taken by three to five million French people, which costs France two million euros per year.”

## France a top drug consumer

According to 2011 study, France is the world’s fifth-largest market for pharmaceuticals, with the average French person having 47 pills and prescriptions in their medical cabinet. The combined cost of those medicines is around 532 euros per person, with the state covering 77 percent of the price, France24 reported.

“We have to do a big clean-up of our pharmacies,” Dr. Even told *Le Parisien*. “France has a huge public debt and the state can make considerable savings.”

“Meanwhile in the UK, where people take far fewer medicines than us, people are no less healthy as a result,” he said.

The two believe that, while there is no room for ‘useless’ drugs on the market, people should certainly continue to use effective drugs. “Antibiotics are the best [medical] discovery of all time,” Even told *Le Parisien*. “Antiretroviral drugs have given us a very real lead on AIDS and a large number of anti-cancer medicines have had an immense impact on our treatment of the disease.”

## Book blasted by medical establishment

The Professional Federation of Medical Industrialists (LEEM) criticized the book as un-academic and unclear. The group argued that the doctors’ assertions could have a destabilizing effect, needlessly alarming ill patients into ceasing treatments for their diseases.

“We must not forget that the state exercises strict controls on drugs. France has specialist [government] agencies responsible for the health of patients and of controlling what information is given to them [about drugs],” LEEM President Christian Lajoux told AFP.