

# Placebo prescription : really deliberately ? A qualitative study.

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**CONTEXT :** Placebo is a substance without any specific activity for the condition being treated. 70% of GPs prescribed it deliberately according to surveys, such as antibiotics, iron, vitamins. In France, Magnesium prescription rated 19,5 millions euros each year.

## RESEARCH QUESTION :

When french GPs decided to prescribe placebo, did they feel completely free to do it?

## METHODS :

- semistructured interviews until saturation. 18 French urban general practitioners, purposive sample.
- evaluative assertion analysis
- expression analysis. Double coding.
- cognitivo-discursive analysis (CDA)<sup>3</sup>

## RESULTS :

Speech disturbance :  
 placebo prescriptors (0.069) = 3 x non-placebo prescriptors (0.026)  
 CDA : social acceptability strategy, convincing technics

## PLACEBO, TIME AND MONEY

Placebo was used:

- to avoid long during consultation
- instead of convincing, counselling, educating, dealing with psychological problems, reported as too long for fee-for-service payment

« Sure I can do it, but they'll have to pay me 100 euros ! »

« Teaching everyone what they should eat to feel better ? It's frightening ! »

« I feel lost with all these changes »

« I'm absolutely convinced that some kill more than they heal »

## GPs BELIEFS ABOUT PATIENTS REQUEST

GPs reported patients strongly asking for a pill when it may not be the best treatment available.

Frustrating the patient would be bad for the relationship.

## KNOWLEDGE, EBM

- doubting about studies reliability, what was safe or not, powerful or not.
- fearing known or unknown side effects of active substances.
- criticizing EBM for being too complex : information about treatments was too hard to follow.

« It's nonsense going against their will ! »

## CONCLUSION :

Prescribing placebo was not an open choice. GPs felt forced because of money issues, doubts about studies reliability and patients beliefs.

- other remuneration methods ? mixed system fee-for-service and capitation ?
- communication on evidence-base therapeutics ?
- promotion of non-pharmacological treatment in the population ?