

French charity attacks Gilead patent for hepatitis drug

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French charity Medecins du Monde (Mdm) on Tuesday said it was contesting a European patent awarded to a hepatitis drug made by US firm Gilead Sciences, arguing the treatment was too costly.

The organisation—"Doctors of the World"—said it had filed a "brief in opposition" with the European Patent Office (EPO), the Munich-based agency that awards patents covering 40 European countries.

The suit concerns sofosbuvir, a drug marketed as Sovaldi, which is the frontline [treatment](#) for hepatitis C.

The goal is to open the way to low-cost generic versions of Solvadi, said Mdm's head of French operations, Jean-Francois Corty.

Mdm said it expected the outcome of its suit, which it described as the first of its kind in Europe by an NGO, to take up to two years.

Gilead was behaving like "a monopoly," Corty said.

"Gilead is abusing its position as patent-holder to demand intolerably high prices from health-care systems" in Europe and elsewhere, he said.

The cost is so high that the drug is being "rationed," Corty claimed.

Mdm said Solvadi was a clearly useful treatment but, in pharmacological terms, it was not so innovative as to deserve patent protection.

Gilead, contacted by AFP, declined to comment on the case.

The suit takes place amid rising concern in Europe about the cost of advanced drugs at a time of budget constraints.

Britain's National Health Service (NHS) last month it would no longer make several cancer treatments available, saying their high cost was not matched by clinical benefits.

A standard 12-week course of Solvadi in France [costs](#) 41,000 euros (46,280 dollars), MDM said.

Treating all patients in France who need the medicine would cost more than five billion euros, or 20 percent of the country's [drug](#) budget, it said.

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