



MEDICINES ON THE WEB – RISKS AND BENEFITS

- The global nature of the Internet makes it an excellent way to promote health. But it can also give misleading information or be used to market harmful healthcare products.
- To a lot of consumers, the Internet means low prices, discounts, privacy, access for people living in remote places or who want first access to new products.
- There are countless illegal offers of medicines via the Internet, many of them counterfeit. According to the World Health Organisation, medicines purchased over the Internet from sites that conceal their physical address are counterfeit in over 50% of cases.

Objectives of the Council of Europe and its EDQM

- guaranteeing everyone's fundamental right to access to information on health issues and raising awareness about the risks of counterfeit medicines for public health.
- combating counterfeit and illegal medicines and healthcare products including those being offered on the web.
- setting standards and practical measures promoting public health and high quality medicines and for countries to cooperate on ways to criminalise illegal practices.

The **European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM)** contributes to the basic human right of access to good quality medicines and healthcare. It also promotes and protects human health by:

- elaborating quality standards for the manufacture and quality control of medicines in Europe (a European Pharmacopoeia comprising over 2,000 standards) and beyond.
- ensuring the application of these official standards to substances used for the production of medicines.
- co-ordinating a network of about 100 official medicines control laboratories in 35 countries.
- working with national and international organisations to combat illegal and counterfeit medicinal and medical products.
- providing policies and model approaches for the safe use of medicines in Europe, including guidelines on pharmaceutical care.
- establishing ethical and quality standards for the collection, storage and use of blood components for blood transfusion and organ transplantation.
- collaborating with national and international organisations to fight counterfeit and illegal medicines.
- contributing to protect health of consumers through specific programmes for standards for cosmetics and food packaging.

Signatory states of the Convention for the elaboration of a European Pharmacopoeia (37):

Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta,

Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the European Community.

Observers (23):

European countries: Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Republic of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Non-European countries: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Israel, Madagascar, Malaysia, Morocco, Senegal, Syria, Tunisia and USA. WHO.

Achievements

- Committee of Ministers Resolution ResAP(2007)2 on good practices for distributing medicines via mail order which is a major breakthrough to protect patient safety and the quality of the delivered medicine, as no specific quality and safety standards for the mail-order trade in medicines currently exist;
- Council of Europe Survey on counterfeit medicines (2006).
- Model of a network of single points of contact (2007).
- Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2004)17 on the impact of information technologies on health care – the patient and Internet.
- Committee of Ministers Resolution ResAP(2001)2 on the pharmacist's role in the framework of health security.
- Practical information guide – available in several languages - for users to distinguish doubtful from reliable medical information and warning about risky behaviour regarding the purchase of medicines through the Internet.
- EDQM training for officials in the health and law enforcement sector on how to combat counterfeit medicines and protect public health.

Next steps

Council of Europe future MEDICRIME Convention

- The Council of Europe has drafted the first international legal instrument on counterfeiting of medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health, the MEDICRIME convention, to criminalise:
 - the manufacturing of counterfeit medical products;
 - supplying, offering to supply and trafficking in counterfeit medical products;
 - the falsification of documents;
 - the unauthorised manufacturing or supplying of medicinal products and the marketing of medical devices that do not comply with conformity requirements.

The future Convention provides a framework for proportionate and dissuasive sanctions, victim protection as well as for national and international co-operation and considers the use of the Internet to distribute counterfeit medical products to be an aggravating circumstance of the criminal acts that requires legal remedies.

Both the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs and the EDQM supported the preparation of the Convention and will promote its implementation.

www.edqm.eu

www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/pharmacrime



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