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, and access for people living in remote places or who want early 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.
- As a result of these illegal offers, consumers may suffer serious damage to their health, financial loss and be targeted by cybercrime.

Objectives

- guaranteeing everyone's fundamental right to access to information on health issues;
- setting standards and practical measures protecting public health and promoting health literacy, for high quality of medicines and healthcare, and for countries to co-operate in criminal law matters;
- combating counterfeit and illegal medicines and healthcare products being offered on the web;
- raising awareness about the risks of counterfeit medicines for public health.

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 medicines;
- providing policies and model approaches for the safe use of medicines in Europe, including guidelines on pharmaceutical care.

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

Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, 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. *World Health Organisation* (WHO).

Achievements

- Committee of Ministers Resolution ResAP(2007)2 on good practices for distributing medicines via mail order;
- Model of a network of single points of contact (2007);
- Council of Europe Survey on counterfeit medicines (2006);
- 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;
- Ongoing training for officials in the health and law enforcement sector on how to combat counterfeit medicines, network and protect public health.

Next steps

The Council of Europe has prepared an international convention against counterfeiting of medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health. The treaty criminalises certain conducts and includes prevention measures.

The text also envisages providing a framework for international co-operation, mutual assistance in criminal law, measures for co-ordination at national level, and protection of victims and witnesses. It is expected to be open for signature in 2010 after it is adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's deciding body.

This convention could be open for participation by Council of Europe member states and also by governments of states in other regions of the world, giving the convention a universal vocation. Both the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs and the Directorate General on Social Cohesion (EDQM) have been involved in its preparation.

www.edqm.eu

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