

From a Programme to a Network

We are pleased to inform you of our plans to change the Pharmaceutical Programme to a network. As you may all know, the Pharmaceutical Programme of WCC/CISS has, for years, been working to support church health services in addressing pharmaceutical issues.

In the light of global changes and the increasing role of the private sector in the health care services, the work of the programme has continued to grow. In order to have a greater impact, better co-ordination, collaboration and participation, we propose forming a network. The network's main target will be the church health institutions and the health care provider in it. If you are involved in the health care services and directly or indirectly deal with pharmaceuticals, we feel you would be an important member of the network.

If you do get excited by the idea (as we hope you will) and would like your organization/institution to become a member (membership is voluntary), please fill a membership form (which can be obtained on request from our offices) and email, fax or post to us.

The first members' meeting, to which all are welcome, is scheduled for 27th - 28th September 2000 at the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva. It is at this meeting that the final name and structure of the network will be decided. Members who will not be able to attend are requested to send their comments/suggestions etc to the secretariat for presentation at the meeting. But we do hope all of you will accept our invitation and join the Network and also make all efforts, in time and finances to come to the members meeting. Let us know if you need more information on how to get to the meeting.
See you there!

DIRECT TO CONSUMER ADVERTISING (DTCA): A DISASTER IN THE MAKING?

In a recent roundtable meeting between *World Health Organization (WHO)* and *Public Interest NGOs (PINGOs)* in Geneva, the issue of *Direct to Consumer Advertising (DTCA)* was raised. The essence of the discussion was to note the need for promoting a precautionary principle in this matter while waiting for evidence of its possible effects.

The PINGOs propose that before promotion of prescription-only drugs become the global norm, health impact assessment (HIA) and an estimation of the effect of DTCA on the implementation of public health priorities is needed.

Why this concern?

DTCA was effectively legalized in the USA in 1997. There is now intense pressure to introduce it in other countries e.g. in the European Union. In 1999, the leading pharmaceutical companies spent over US\$ 1.5 billion promoting prescription medicine to the US public - more than was spent on advertising in professional journals. Obviously this is seen as a major way to sell their drugs. The problem is that not much is known about the nature and extent of possible health impact of DTCA. Proponents of DTCA suggest that DTCA will provide useful and helpful information to patients, create greater awareness of health problems and treatment

options and destigmatise illness and disease. All this sounds very good. There are however grounds for concern and questions to ask. For example,

- Drug promotion to professionals has been the norm for many years. This has been based on the understanding that they are able to make critical evaluation of the information and make rational choices. Yet evidence shows that such promotion has irrefutably very often lead to irrational drug use. Is it likely that the lay person would fare any better? What will be the effect on the efforts to promote rational drug use?
- Would DTCA tend to promote drug therapies over possibly better alternatives including non-drug interventions? Would it affect people's perception of health and health needs? Would it build the mentality that there is a pill for every ill?
- What would be the effect of increased demand on National Drug Policy? On the health care provider's ability to prescribe according to professional decision? On editorial independence and coverage of health issues by press and media?
- DTCA is likely to be dominated by the large pharmaceutical companies and the promotion of branded products. Would this act as a barrier to smaller and invariably, local producers?
- What then would be the effect on the production and use of generics? What would be the effect on prices and effective patent life?
- Unlike USA, many developing and poor countries do not have or are unable to enforce laws and regulations to protect the consumer. What then will counterbalance the adverse effects of DTCA on such consumers?

There may be many other questions. Unless we address them before embracing DTCA, for countries which lack even the ability to enforce prescription laws, the consequences may be very serious.

Many of us have been working to promote rational drug use and any factor that may impact on this work is of concern. We need to take steps to acquaint ourselves with further understanding of DTCA.

The most urgent course of action is to call for health impact assessment of DTCA.

Further articles, comments, suggestions on this issue are welcome.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

- ***Wemos Access Campaign***
WEMOS is spearheading a campaign in Netherlands whose theme is the promotion of access to essential drugs to low income groups in developing countries. Working in collaboration with partners in Netherlands and in several countries in the South, the campaign will aim to inform and raise awareness on issues influencing access and thus motivate Dutch health professionals and other target groups to take positions and contribute towards solutions and necessary policy changes. International cooperation is seen as a major factor for the success of this campaign.

For more information on the work of WEMOS visit their website "www.wemos.nl"

- **Drugs for HIV/AIDS**

Five of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies are offering to slash the prices of HIV drugs (up to 85%) for people living in poor nations. This will enable more people in Africa to gain access to the life-saving but extremely costly drugs that have revolutionized US and Europe.

But though this is seen as positive activity, it is far from adequate, since it does not address the fundamental factors affecting access to medicines for all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. **WHO Essential Drugs List**

The new WHO model essential drugs list (revised December 1999) is now out. Members of the Pharmaceutical Network can get copies on request from the Programme.

2. **Revised Drug donations**

The new revised inter agency guidelines for drug donations (1999) are now available from WHO. They are also available in French and Spanish over the web i.e. <http://www.drugdonations.org/es> (Spanish); <http://www.drugdonations.org/fr> (French) and <http://www.drugdonations.org/eng>

3. **Instruction manual for building and operating a medical waste incinerator**

This incinerator has been specifically designed to be cheap to build and operate in rural areas. You can use this manual and send back any problems or queries. You can also inform of any incinerators you build, and how they meet your requirements. This information would help the designers to work on improved versions of the incinerator. In areas where a considerable number of incinerators are needed, it may be possible to arrange for staff from De Montfort University to give short, practical courses on the construction, operation and maintenance of the Incinerator. This incinerator is not approved for urban areas. For more information and the manual please contact D J Picken of De Montfort University on email "djp@picken98.freeserve.co.uk"

4. **ISDB (International Society of Drugs Bulletin) has a new mailing address:**

General Secretary, ISDB. Medsafe, P O Box 5013, Wellington, NEW ZEALAND

5. **INRUD News on the web**

The International Network for Rational Use of Drugs (INRUD) News is now available on the web. INRUD News is published twice a year and contents include updates on INRUD global activities, country and support group reports, reports on meetings and workshops, research briefs, samples of E-Drug communications, and references to articles on rational drug use. The

website address is <http://www.msh.org/inrud>. For more information email: "inrud@msh.org"

THE BOOK CORNER

Management of Drug Purchasing, Storage and Distribution: Manual for Developing countries. Ed Gerd Dörner, German Pharma Health Fund e.V (GPHF).

This small booklet (51p) summarized the principles described in the larger MSH Managing Drug Supply Book. Being industry sponsored, it however has some bias e.g. it fails to recommend the use of official pharmacopoeia and formularies for unbiased drug information. It fails to inform that, in the case of drugs, distribution should be on First Expiry First Out principle. It is however adequate as a quick reference for non-pharmaceutical staff who need to know the principles of drug management. You can get a free copy from the Pharmaceutical Programme or GPHF, Karlstrasse 21, W-6000, Frankfurt/Main 1, Germany

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Event name: **PAG Meeting**

Date: **27th - 28th September 2000**

Location: **Ecumenical Centre, Geneva**

This is an ecumenical group made up of various people working in health, particularly but not exclusively in the pharmaceutical field, from church related health services. Among the discussion items this year is Traditional Medicines and how they can be incorporated in the present systems and the proposed pharmaceutical network's name and structure. There will also be a sharing of experience of one church's involvement in promoting access to drugs through a community- based business model of Cry for the World Foundation.

Event name: **Drug Management and Rational Drug Use Course (DMRUD)**

Date: **March 5th - April 8th 2001**

Location: **Dabou, Ivory Coast**

The next course will be conducted in French. Applications are invited from physicians, pharmacists, hospital administrators, matrons and other health care staff in church- related health services. Enquiries and applications should be made to the Programme at the address below by 30th November 2000.

Event name: **Promoting Access and Rational Drug Use workshop**

Date: **October 18th -22st , 2000**

Location: **Chennai, India**

The Inter-church service association (ICSA) in collaboration with the Pharmaceutical Programme is organizing a four-day workshop for healthcare providers/officials and groups interested in improving access and the use of drugs in church related health services in India. For more information contact Dr Moses Manohar on email: jjyotiic@md3.vsnl.net.in.

Event name: **Workshop on Healthcare Technology Management**

Date: **October**

Location: **Cameroon**

This workshop is organized for healthcare providers, hospital technicians and representatives of MoH's. For more details on this course contact Dr Juergen on email: fakt@fakt-consult.de or visit their website at <http://www/fakt-consult.de>

Event Name: **Consumer Reports on Medicines**

Date: **September 29th -October 1st 2000**

Location: **Sigtuna, Sweden**

This International working conference is being organized by KILEN in cooperation with other national and international organizations. The conference objective is to give participants the tools and the inspiration needed to establish system to capitalize on medicines user's (consumers') experiences. Programme and application forms are available on website (www.kilen.org). Representatives of consumer and advocacy NGOs can apply for fee reduction. For fuller information visit the website or email kilen@kilen-institutet.se . or Postal address, KILEN, Kammakargatan 7, SE-111 40 Stockholm, SWEDEN.

Event name: **Promoting rational drug use in the community**

Date: **8-22 October 2000**

Location: **Rose Garden Resort, Bangkok, Thailand**

A two-week course for health programme staff from ministries of health, universities, development agencies, non-governmental and other organizations, and individuals interested in improving drug use in the community. For more information contact: Dr Ria Reis on email: amma@pscw.uva.nl

Event name: **International symposium on hospital based drug production**

Date: **October 18th - 20th 2000**

Location: **Moshi, Tanzania**

ELCT Infusion Units Project is hosting an International symposium in Moshi-Tanzania. The three day symposium will cover: quality assurance in hospital based drug production, introduction to appropriate production equipment and production processes and sharing experiences from different countries. For more details contact:- The Project Co-ordinator, ELCT Infusion Units Project, P O Box 481, Moshi, Tanzania. Email: IUP-MOSHI@MAF.ORG. Tel: 255-27-2-52303 (from 1st July)