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European pharmacist organisations make joint call for action on medicines shortages

The representative organisations for European community, hospital and industrial pharmacists have issued a joint call for action by Governments, regulators and the European Commission to tackle the growing problem of medicines shortages.

Presenting evidence at the European Parliament on the scale of the difficulties being experienced across sectors, spokespersons from the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU), European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) and European Industrial Pharmacists Group (EIPG) called for:

- heightened awareness by Governments and national regulators of the critical impacts medicines shortages have in relation to patient welfare and safety, and the accompanying need for urgent action;
- greater investigation of the impact that national strategies on medicines pricing and reimbursement are having on the operation of the supply chain; and
- better sharing and implementation of best practices between countries in responding to medicines shortage, including the operation of information portals and early warning systems.

John Chave, Secretary General of PGEU said: *“Evidence from PGEU members suggests that this is a problem affecting countries from all corners of Europe, and a huge range of medicines. While all stakeholders need to work together to address the causes, as a minimum community pharmacists need to be in a position to properly inform patients when a medicine is, or is likely to become, unavailable, and the causes and duration of the shortage. The pharmaceutical sector as a whole has a duty to avoid leaving patients in the dark”.*

Roberto Frontini, President of EAHP said:

“EAHP’s recent pan-European survey on medicines shortages clearly demonstrates that the shortages problem does not respect national borders and is affecting virtually every hospital in Europe. Immense amounts of hospital pharmacists’ time are being diverted from other elements of patient care to simply source medicines. With the

evidence strongly suggesting the problem is becoming worse, doing nothing is no longer an option. Action is required and our organisations believe the proposals in our joint call today represent a firm basis for European Governments and regulators to begin improving the situation.”

Luigi Martini, Immediate Past- President of EIPG said:

“Each field of the pharmacy profession brings an important perspective to the issue of medicines shortages. From the industrial pharmacist perspective we have strong concerns that some of the requirements of the otherwise welcome 2011 Directive on falsified medicines may unintentionally increase the experience of medicines shortages. This relates in particular to new conditions placed on the import of active pharmaceutical ingredients from outside the EU, scheduled to be enacted this year. Overall, it reemphasises the multi-factoral nature of shortages, and the need to understand the inter-relatedness of pharmaceutical policy decisions. All supply chain partners need to work together in sharing their experiences, identifying the problems, and advancing solutions.”

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The context of the organisation’s joint call was an event in the European Parliament entitled “The Economic Crisis & Access to Medicines in Europe”. The event included presentations from PGEU, EAHP and EIPG on pharmacist experiences of medicines shortage problems. More information here: <http://www.eph.org/spip.php?article5674>
2. The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) is the European association representing more than 400,000 community pharmacists. PGEU’s members are the national associations and professional bodies of pharmacists in 32 European countries. www.pgeu.eu
3. At the beginning of 2012, PGEU conducted a survey among its members, national community pharmacy associations, in order to better understand the extent of medicine shortages in the EU. According to the survey results, although some countries are more affected than others, medicine shortages have been reported by all respondents to the survey and the problem is increasing. According to the survey, a broad range of medicines is affected, including even basic medication such as aspirin⁴. The survey suggests that the prevalence of medicine shortages has increased in the past year- just in the UK over 1 million branded medicine supply failures occur each year. More information on the PGEU Statement on Medicines Shortages here: <http://www.pgeu.eu/en/library.html>
4. The European Association of Hospital Pharmacists is an association of 32 national organisations representing hospital pharmacists at European and international levels. It represents and develops the hospital pharmacy profession within Europe in order to ensure the continuous improvement of care and outcomes for patients in the hospital setting. This is achieved through science, research, education, practice, as well as sharing best-practice and responsibility with other healthcare professionals. <http://www.eahp.eu>

5. The results of a recent pan-European survey by EAHP revealed that 99% of hospital pharmacists report experiencing problems with medicines shortages in the past year, with 63% of hospital pharmacists reporting medicines shortages to be a weekly, sometimes daily, occurrence. 77% consider that problem has become worse in the last year. More information here: <http://www.eahp.eu/press-room/99-hps-experience-medicines-shortages-past-year>
6. The European Industrial Pharmacists Group (EIPG) is a European association representing the national, professional organisations of pharmacists employed in the pharmaceutical or allied industries of the Member States of the European Union, the European Economic Area, or European countries having a mutual recognition agreement with the European Union on compliance control of regulated medicines. <http://www.eipg.eu/>
7. At their recent General Assembly, EIPG members discussed the various causes of product shortages which include single source strategies by purchasers, fewer manufacturers, low levels of contingency stocks, parallel trade, downward pressure on generic prices and the complexities of outsourcing. It was agreed that it is crucial for all players in the pharmaceutical supply chain to exercise their best efforts to honour their main public service obligation of supplying medicines to the patient, and for cost containment policies in pharmaceutical spending not to seek to achieve savings through measures that risk compromising the pharmaceutical supply chain.

