



Inappropriate Use of Medications Puts a Bigger Strain on Health Budget than Smoking

- **Only every second patient takes medications properly**
- **Targeted assistance from health professionals successful**
- **EU-level research on causes of and opportunities for improvement of non-compliance demanded**

Non-compliance concerning medications, which means the improper use of medications, has reached epidemic levels. A World Health Organization (WHO) assessment from 2003 showed that only half of patients followed instructions from doctors, pharmacists and on package inserts. Yet those who forget to take their medications or take too large or too small of a dose endanger not only the success of the therapy as well as their lives, but also generate enormous costs. “The economic burden of medicine non-compliance has been calculated to be twice as large as that of smoking,” reported Peter Stephens of the health industry-specialised consulting firm IMS Health at a workshop specifically on the topic of compliance held at the European Health Forum Gastein, the most important European event on health policy.

These expenditures could be considerably reduced through targeted control. Particularly with chronic patients or patients with a more complex medication, better monitoring would make sense and constitutes a major savings potential. Several examples from the WHO report:

- **Treatment for diabetes** could be 25 percent cheaper if the use of medication were controlled
- When beta blockers for **blood pressure** are taken incorrectly, complications occur 4.5 times more frequently
- 45 percent of the overall costs can be saved through optimal **asthma** controls

In view of the scarcity of health resources in all European countries, the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) has demanded a response to this miserable situation using a patient-oriented approach. The organisation, which represents national pharmacy associations from 29 European countries, conducted 70 studies in various countries between 1990 and 2002, showing that competent patient counselling and care can be extremely useful for encouraging correct use medications.

“Cooperation on the part of health care professionals is essential for success, but it is only one building block,” says Mel Read, President of the European Cervical Cancer Association.

Further research is urgently needed in order to better understand why patients stop taking their medications too soon and to facilitate self-monitoring with medications for chronic patients. That “national and European health policies have finally made non-compliance an issue is long overdue,” according to Read.

Further information and abstracts from the lectures at

Lunch Workshop 3 / Pharmaceuticals – Compliance:

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