



Medications Unaffordable for More and More Patients

- **The WHO and the World Bank also see growing problems in Europe**
- **Support for the development of medications for diseases of poverty**
- **Demand for clear prioritization in the supply of medications**

European Health Forum Gastein, 2007. For an increasing number of people the rising costs of medications through deductibles are becoming a problem that has virtually obstructed and access to needed medications and in many cases made it impossible. This development, which the WHO and the World Bank have criticized particularly in developing countries, is reaching European countries to an increasing degree. At the 10th European Health Forum Gastein taking place from 3 to 6 October in Bad Hofgastein, a high-profile panel of experts discussed possibilities for ensuring that the necessary medication remains or becomes accessible to poorer patients as well.

The varying degree of good access to medication is reinforced by the fact that in poorer countries health care systems often reimburse only small percentages of the costs of medications, thus the deductibles for patients are higher than in more affluent countries. This in turn leads patients in poorer countries having to pay more for medications in absolute terms than patients in wealthier countries. “The only way to mitigate this problem at least for the majority of the population is to set clear priorities,” renowned expert Hugo Hurts of the Dutch Ministry of Health points out. “With restricted funds the decision must be made not to fund certain expensive medications thereby enabling access to cheaper medications for a far bigger group of those in need.”

“By global comparison the situation in Europe is relatively good,” German MEP and health expert Jorgo Chatzimarkakis says. “But the current development does not reflect our aim that regarding access to medications Europe plays a global cutting-edge role in which the respect toward life and health is the most important precept around which political and economic decision-makers are oriented. The EU is to become, so to say, the bio-zone of the world.”

In Europe and even moreso in developing countries the improvement of access to medications for poorer groups in society is increasingly becoming a key question for the quality of the supply of medications as a whole. An intergovernmental working group from the World Health Assembly, the IGWG - Intergovernmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property, is to help in this regard as well. Its aim is to promote the development and low-cost production of medications for diseases afflicting especially the poorer groups in the population. As this problem can only be solved through holistic access, which includes the financing of research and development as well as new methods for pricing, all interest groups must be involved: the pharmaceutical industry, patients and consumer organizations, universities, private institutions as well as EU experts and all member states. At the second meeting of the IWGW from 5 – 10 November the member states will determine their strategy and plan of action.

Due to the considerable migration from developing countries to the European Union, the success of these efforts is also of enormous importance for the EU itself, otherwise diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV, the battle against which has been relatively successful within the EU, threaten by indirect means to become a serious problem for the entire healthcare situation again. “Fair, affordable costs for medications in and outside of Europe are therefore of crucial importance for the European healthcare systems,” says Chatzimarkakis.

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Further press information and photographs of the EHFG can be found at www.ehfg.org.