

FIP STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE THE PHARMACIST'S RESPONSIBILITY AND ROLE IN TEACHING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ABOUT MEDICINES

Medicines are an important integral part of most courses of therapy. They are more effective and more potent therapeutic agents than in the past, hence the need for special care in their use. An important role of the pharmacist is to disseminate information and advise patients about medicines. This Statement of Principle advocates and supports extending this role to children and adolescents.

Appropriate use of medicines is an important life skill that should be acquired before an individual has personal responsibility for using or buying medicines, or for giving them to others. Currently children have few opportunities to learn how to use medicines appropriately, although their use is a common everyday activity in all countries. They are, however, undoubtedly learning something. Children daily receive messages about medicines by observing family members, by taking medicines themselves, by watch-

ing television and movies, by exposure to media advertising, from their peers and through visiting places where medicines are sold. Some of these messages are appropriate; others are not.

It seems highly likely, given their level of exposure to messages about medicines, that children are forming beliefs and attitudes that will influence their behaviours into adulthood. Published research shows that many children, especially chronically ill children, are active participants in their own health care and have more autonomy in using medicines than most adults recognise. It follows that, to improve use of medicines in the population, education about use of medicines should begin in childhood and extend into adolescence.

Including a general education about medicines in school-based health education curricula is one obvious solution. Educational programmes and materials for teaching children and adolescents about medicines should address what children and adolescents know about medicines, their behaviour relative to medicines, and what they want to know about medicines, as well as what health care providers think they should know.

In addition, children and adolescents should receive information on the specific medicines they use from their health care providers and parents.

Communication with children, adolescents and their parents about medicines requires special training, founded on sound research. This training should include knowled-

ge of cognitive development, how to communicate effectively with those at various stages of cognitive development and how to counsel children and adolescents with special needs arising from culture, gender, disability, learning difficulties, behaviour or health status. There should also be training in the types of material such as cartoons, CD-ROMs and computer games likely to aid communication with children and adolescents of various ages.

Every pharmacist has a responsibility to acquire the skills needed to serve local populations including subgroups. Thus, the professional education of pharmacists should equip and motivate them to educate children and adolescents and their parents about medicines and should include teaching on:

- the skills needed to communicate information to children and adolescents effectively;
- how to help parents ensure that their own behaviour provides a good model for their children of responsible use of medicines;
- how to help parents gradually transfer the responsibility for the use of medicines to their children as the children grow older; and
- how to help children, adolescents, and parents acquire and critically evaluate the quality and
- reliability of sources used for information about medicines.

Pharmacists, as recognised experts on medicines, should take a leading advocacy and coordinating role among other health care providers, professional associations, national and local governments, public health authorities, parent organisations, consumer and patient support groups, educators, and the media.

Against this background, the FIP Recommends:

1. Pharmacists, with the cooperation of and normally in the presence of a parent, guardian or carer should communicate directly with children of school age about their medicines, both prescription and non-prescription, in an appropriate area of the pharmacy. Pharmacists should, in addition to any printed information required by law or professional standards, provide written material which in their professional judgment, is appropriate for children and adolescents of the relevant age group, to supplement information given orally.

2. Pharmacists should encourage children and adolescents to ask questions about their medicines both at the time of supply and later.

3. Professional associations should develop materials to assist pharmacists to help parents teach their children how to use medicines appropriately and where to find and evaluate information about medicines.

4. Whenever possible, pharmacists should promote proactively, the concept of educating children about medicines by speaking to teachers, parents, and community groups.

5. Pharmacy professional associations, in cooperation with other health professional associations, school health education authorities, teachers' organisations and the media, should coordinate education on medicines for children and adolescents, promoting the concept that this should be included in school health education curricula from the earliest school years.

6. Research should be undertaken to identify and overcome barriers to pharmacists counselling children, adolescents, parents and carers about medicines.

7. Communicating with children, adolescents, and their parents, guardians or carers should be an integral part of undergraduate and continuing education programmes for pharmacists. In addition, externships, internships, and post-graduate placements should, whenever possible, incorporate experiences in communicating with children and adolescents about their medicines.

8. Governments should recognise the benefits that will accrue if children learn to treat medicines responsibly and use them properly from as early an age as possible. Governments should therefore include provision for such an initiative in their health plans, the initiative to include support for pharmaceutical associations to assist them and their members in implementing these recommendations.