

THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACIST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE HIV-AIDS PANDEMIC

A joint declaration between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

- There are today 1.6 million reported AIDS cases, but the unofficial estimate stands at over 8 million; this means that the pandemic is the most lifethreatening challenge our society has had to face since the beginning of the 20th century.
- The majority of cases are in sub-Saharan Africa and in some developed countries, but extensive spread in South East and South Asia indicates that this area could become the next epicentre of the pandemic.
- People with clinical AIDS are by far outnumbered by those who have been infected by the virus but who have not yet actually developed the disease. WHO estimates that the infected population will amount to about 40 million by the year 2000.

- As is the case for many diseases, behavioural factors and lifestyles are known determinants of HIV infection.

- All individuals concerned by the disease - whether clinically ill, HIV-positive or relatives of those infected - are confronted with problems of a medical, social and economic nature, and they may also face discrimination.

Now therefore :

WHO and FIP intend to work actively to prevent the further spread of the HIV-AIDS virus, to seek to improve patient care and to fight against discrimination in all its forms. This joint commitment is based on the Organization's mandate in public health and on the worldwide presence and vocation of pharmacists in the field of health:

- Pharmacists all over the world are the most numerous and easily accessible 'health outlets' for the general public;
- Trained in public health questions, with long experience of entering into dialogue with, and providing education of and information to the general public, pharmacists are well-placed to participate in health education and prevention campaigns;
- As health professionals, they are in permanent contact with decision-makers in the epidemiological, diagnostic and therapeutic fields; they participate in the actual treatment and follow-up of patients, and they make a major contribution to the collection, analysis and communication of health data.

Thus :

In co-operation with WHO, FIP has drawn up a set of guiding principles for pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists on the approaches they can take in the fight against the spread of HIV-AIDS.

In this way, WHO and FIP believe that pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists, working with all interested parties, can help in the fight against the HIV-AIDS pandemic and against any other factor which contributes to its spread-in particular injectable drug abuse.

WHO undertakes to promote these principles in all relevant fora in which the organization participates.

FIP undertakes to promote the principles to national associations of pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists and to individual pharmacists worldwide and to encourage national associations to transmit the declaration to the health authorities of their country.

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September 2, 1997

Guiding principles:

WHO and FIP urge pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists, together with their national and international associations or federations, to draw up individual plans, within an overall national strategy wherever possible committing them to the following guiding principles:

- Encourage and promote better support networks for people with HIV-AIDS, and even more determined action against discrimination;
- Participate in the global struggle against the HIV-AIDS pandemic, on the basis of the commitments made by heads of state and governments at the summits in London, 1992, and Paris, 1994;
- Fight to ensure that all proven treatments be made accessible in all countries to all who could benefit from them without discrimination;
- Co-ordinate with all those working in public health education, and seek closer ties with other individuals and community groups who could be usefully involved in the effort to combat the disease, in terms of prevention, treatment and patient-care and support - teachers, family associations, politicians, etc., and through community involvement of pharmacists;
- Provide information on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) prevention and treatment in order to promote 'health awareness behaviour' with regard to STD's;
- Develop specific training programmes for professionals, whether initial training or continuing education;
- Motivate pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists to get involved at national level in the making of public policies related to HIV-control;
- Initiate a dialogue between health professionals, financing bodies and patient associations: such a pooling of talents will ensure the comprehensive care of the greatest number of patients, fully respecting both ethical and cost effectiveness requirements;
- Participate, together with the relevant health professionals - doctors, nurses, social workers, etc. - in the evaluation of clinical treatment and in the provision and follow-up of treatment;
- Encourage national and international pharmaceutical associations or federations to enter into dialogue with international organizations representing the pharmaceutical industry, in order to identify all possible means permitting an improvement in access to treatment programmes;
- Develop, implement and evaluate activities within national field programmes: e.g. drug substitution programmes, needle and syringe exchange programmes and condom availability;
- Promote and set up interprofessional networks to collect, analyse and disseminate data at both national and international levels;
- Participate in scientific research involving drug trials with a view to ensuring that internationally agreed ethical principles are respected.