
International health experts join forces to assure quality of pharmaceutical services and products

“Effective medicine can be practised only where there is efficient drug management. Only when the pharmacist has been accepted as a vital member of the health care team can the necessary supporting services be organized with the professionalism that they demand”, said Ms Agathe Wehrli, Chief of Drug Regulatory Support at World Health Organization headquarters, Geneva.

Whereas in the absence of pharmacies, there is an obvious need for doctors to dispense medicines as well as prescribe them, this could lead to a conflict of interest between these two functions, Ms Wehrli said. “The patients’ interests are better safeguarded when both the doctor and the pharmacist carry out the functions they were specially trained for. The separation of prescribing and dispensing is a global problem”.

According to WHO, highly-trained pharmacists are vital to efficient drug procurement, distribution and supply. At hospital and community level they also hold a key responsibility in assuring the safe and effective use of good quality drugs and acting as health educators. By virtue of their specialized training they have important roles to assume in pharmaceutical industry and regulatory control.

Promoting the role of the pharmacist is also a response to a resolution adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1988, asking for the initiation of programmes for the prevention and detection of the export, import and smuggling of falsely-labelled, spurious, counterfeit or sub-standard pharmaceutical preparations. Properly managed and controlled systems to supply and distribute medicines are a safeguard against infiltration of the pharmaceutical market by counterfeit and sub-standard products.

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Geneva*