



The European Older People's Platform
La Plateforme européenne des Personnes Âgées



Joint press release
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Relevant health information: MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR EUROPE!

Today at the European Parliament in Brussels, Dr Thomas Ulmer MEP (Germany, EPP) and Carl Schlyter MEP (Sweden, Greens), hosted and chaired an expert meeting on the European Commission's controversial legislative proposals on 'information' to the general public on prescription medicines.

93 participants attended, representing the full spectrum of healthcare stakeholders – patient and family groups, consumer organisations, policy-makers, social security systems, health professionals, and pharmaceutical companies.

The speakers highlighted the need for **reliable, non-promotional, comparative health information adapted to users**, from independent sources. They also called for concerted action to ensure better quality user-friendly package leaflets and increased transparency of Drug Regulatory Agencies.

MEP Carl Schlyter (Sweden, Greens) said:

“When you are sick and worried it is extremely important that you have access to reliable and neutral information that is not ruled by commercial interests.”

Many participants questioned the added value of the proposal and its concrete benefits for public health. Real-life examples were used to show how the boundaries between information and advertising are frequently blurred, and how the changes to the legislation would expose the European public to promotional information.

MEP Dr Thomas Ulmer (Germany, EPP) said:

“I am very much in favour of enabling patients to receive more information about prescription medicines. However, I am worried that a clear distinction between information and advertising cannot be drawn.”

The European Commission was called on to work on a new and **more ambitious strategy for relevant health information** aimed at developing and strengthening existing sources of comparative information that helps patients to weigh the pros and cons of all existing treatments in order to participate in informed treatment choices.

The transfer of competence on pharmaceuticals and medical devices from the European Commission Directorate General (DG) Enterprise and Industry to a DG focused on Health and Consumer policy was welcomed, with the hope that it will contribute to correcting years of imbalance in EU medicines' policy, and ensuring policies more in line with public health priorities.

Speakers' quotes:

Barbara Mintzes, Assistant Professor at University of British Columbia (Canada), said:

“Lessons should be learned from the disastrous experience of reminder ads in Canada and of DTCA in the US. Rather than weakening the legislation by introducing changes to articles 86 and 88 of Directive 2001/83/EC, the Commission should be striving to fully implement and strengthen the European regulation on pharmaceutical promotion.”

Ilaria Passarani, Head of Health Department at European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC) said:

“Consumers have the right to high quality, non-promotional and comparative information about medicines, health and treatments. The European Commission proposal is far from meeting patients and consumers' needs and expectations.”

Jörg Schaaber, President of the International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB) added:

“Pharmaceutical companies 'information' to doctors frequently mislead health professionals despite their abilities to judge about treatments. This negative experience shouldn't be extended to patients. Many reliable independent patient information sources already exist in Europe: they should be developed and sustained.”

Cédric Diat, from the Association François Aupetit (Crohn's disease) (AFA) added:

“Progress for European patients would be for national health authorities to become more transparent providers of information on the efficacy and safety of medicines. Ensuring the participation of patients and their representatives at each step of information-making is the key to truly putting patients at the core of public health information.”

Anne-Sophie Parent from AGE-the European Older People's Platform (AGE) added:

“Older people need clear, reliable and updated information about the medications they are prescribed. The pharmaceutical industry, due to unavoidable conflicts of interest, should not be allowed to communicate directly with the public about the medicines it produces beyond the boundaries that are currently set in the law.”



For more detailed information on this event, please contact:

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