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COUNTERFEIT MEDICINES - COMMUNICATION EMPOWERS THE PUBLIC TO PARTICIPATE IN MINIMISING HEALTH RISKS

Counterfeit medicines and similar crimes pose a threat to those most vulnerable, the patients, and unfortunately these problems are on the rise in Europe and worldwide.

General awareness of the issues surrounding counterfeit medicines' is still insufficient: Positive communication while avoiding undue panic and the provision of tailored, need to know information to all stakeholders, are prerequisites for addressing counterfeit medicines and related crimes in a forthright manner.

The drug regulatory authorities have a key role to play in communication with all concerned authorities (e.g. via the network of single points of contact "SPOCs") and with other stakeholders such as those involved in pharmaceutical production and distribution, health professionals, the media and the general public.

A new model for risk communications strategies for drug regulatory authorities was developed and adopted by the EDQM's* Committee of Experts on minimising public health risks posed by counterfeiting medicines and related crimes during its recent meeting (28-29 October 2008). With this model, drug regulatory authorities have a basis to prepare and implement risk communication procedures at national level, to proactively raise awareness and share specific information about incidences so helping to minimise possible harm.

Strategies include the basic principles for risk communication and examples of risk communications from several health authorities and stakeholder associations. This harmonised approach represents a step forward in the combat against counterfeit medicines for all stakeholders and the general public.

Moreover, the 3rd General Meeting of the WHO International Medical Products Anti-counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT) in Hammamet, Tunisia on 3-5 December 2008 endorsed the new model, thus improving its outreach and applicability at global level.

The EDQM supports the efforts of drug regulatory authorities to protect the public from sub-standard, as well as counterfeit and illegal medicines and similar crimes.

A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.

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