



30/05/2011, Strasbourg, France

Note for the Editors: The Official Medicines Control Laboratories (OMCL) Network was formed in 1994, under the aegis of the Council of Europe, to co-ordinate the administrative and technical activities of the OMCLs, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge amongst authorities in Europe and to influence future development through harmonised common standards, based on the legal requirement for testing medicinal products. For more information, please go to: www.edqm.eu.

16th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF OFFICIAL MEDICINES CONTROL LABORATORIES (OMCLs), DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY, 23-27 May 2011

Organised by the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) of the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Official Medicines Control Laboratory (OMCL) of North Rhine-Westphalia, LIGA.NRW, the European Network of Official Medicines Control Laboratories held its 16th Annual Meeting in Düsseldorf, Germany, from 23-27 May 2011. Representing 55 institutions and 34 countries, 204 experts in the field of medicine surveillance and testing came together over the course of this week-long meeting to exchange experiences and to discuss matters of common interest for the co-ordination and harmonisation of their efforts to protect patient health in Europe. In different parallel meetings, the results of expert working groups over the previous year, as well as proposals for future *ad hoc* working groups, were presented and discussed and common working programmes were established for the coming year.

One important aspect of the OMCL Network is the common recognition of results from market surveillance and Official Control Authority Batch Release (OCABR) testing, thereby assuring that increasingly scarce resources are shared efficiently among the member states to guarantee the same quality of medicines throughout Europe. On an EU level, this common recognition is attained, for example, through the co-ordinated testing of centrally-authorised (CAP) and mutually-recognised/decentrally-authorised (MRP/DCP) products and for medicines undergoing OCABR.

The OMCL Network also includes Official Medicines Control Laboratories of many of the non-EU member states of the Council of Europe, who are equally represented at the Annual Meeting of the Network and participate in a great number of expert groups, training programmes and elaboration of common guidelines for some activities. In an effort to strengthen the participation of all members, proposals for the improvement of the decision-making process of the Network and further ways of encouraging OMCLs to contribute to the work of the steering committees were presented at this year's Annual Meeting. In addition, rules for the maintenance of membership to the Network were discussed and the terms of reference of the Network were amended.

The already well-established Network for OCABR of sensitive medicines, such as vaccines and human plasma derivatives, was strengthened by the acceptance of an application for a Memorandum of Understanding with the Canadian OMCL, as part of Health Canada, which was also in the spirit of exchanging information on products available on both markets.

Other key topics discussed were the report on the outcome and follow-up of a major OMCL symposium on combating counterfeit and illegal medicinal products that was held in Strasbourg in March 2011, and the development of specific projects with the aim of detecting illegal active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and APIs of poor quality.

The next annual meeting of the European OMCL Network will be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in co-operation with the OMCL of the Danish Medicines Agency, from 11-15 June, 2012.

For more information, please go to: www.edqm.eu.

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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.