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Note for the Editors: Further information is available on the internet site: www.edqm.eu

COMBATING COUNTERFEIT AND OTHER ILLEGAL MEDICINES SYMPOSIUM

From 29-31 March 2011 the first symposium on combating counterfeit and other illegal medicines, specifically targeted to Official Medicines Control Laboratories (OMCLs), took place at the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. In total, 106 participants registered for the event, which included representatives from OMCLs that are members of the General European OMCL Network (GEON), national competent authorities, the European Commission and the pharmaceutical industry.

The first two days, which were run as closed sessions restricted to members of the GEON and the European National Competent Authorities, focused on the technical aspects of falsified medicines testing. In the scientific lectures, poster presentations and workshops, the following topics were addressed and discussed:

- Authenticity testing of counterfeit medicines in the legal supply chain;
- Different testing strategies in detecting counterfeit and illegal medicines (including active ingredients) within the legal and illegal markets, which was underlined by a live demonstration of the work of mobile laboratories;
- Examples of falsified medicines in the biological field, an increasing phenomenon;
- Sampling strategies, proper preparation of test protocols and analytical reports for prosecution.

At the end of the second day the decision was taken by the plenum to establish an OMCL reflection group in order to further work on concerted strategies of the network in the fight against falsified medicines.

The last day of the symposium was dedicated to general and collaborative aspects in this area and was also open to invited guests from industry.

During the morning session, representatives from European National Competent Authorities, forensic laboratories, enforcement groups, the European Commission and the pharmaceutical industry reported on legal measures taken at a European level with respect to the fight against falsified medicines (*e.g.* the MEDICRIME convention of the Council of Europe, falsified medicines legislation of the European Union) and practical experience in the field.

The symposium was closed with a round table discussion involving representatives from the different groups. During the discussion the importance of collaboration involving all stakeholders was emphasised. In addition, a legal loophole with respect to falsified dietary supplements and similar “medicines in disguise” was identified, and the role of the OMCLs in assisting to tackle this issue was addressed. The Director of the EDQM summarised the three days and stressed the necessity to continue, and further strengthen, the communication between the concerned partners.

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Note for the Editor: The EDQM is a leading organisation that protects public health by enabling development, supporting implementation, and monitoring the application of quality standards for safe medicines and their safe use. Our standards are recognised as a scientific benchmark world-wide. The European Pharmacopoeia¹ is legally-binding in European Member States. Similarly, the EDQM develops guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ transplantation and consumer health issues.

¹There are currently thirty-seven members of the European Pharmacopoeia Commission: *Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom and the European Union* and twenty-three observers: *The World Health Organisation (WHO); 6 member states of the Council of Europe: Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine; 16 other countries in the world: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Israel, Madagascar, Malaysia, Morocco, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Kazakhstan, Senegal, Syria, Tunisia, United States of America.*