



# CP1999/031 EN

Comité Permanent des Médecins Européens  
Standing Committee of European Doctors

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## Subject

Final draft of the PGEU leaflet on "The Internet and Medicines"

## Sujet

Projet final de brochure du GPUE sur "Internet et les médicaments"

### Concerning / Concerne

Organisation of Health Care, Social Security, Health Economics and  
Pharmaceutical Industry Subcommittee  
Commissin Organisation des Soins de Santé, Sécurité Sociale, Economie  
de la Santé et Industrie Pharmaceutique

### Purpose / Objet

Discussion

### Key word / Mot clé

Pharmaceutical products - Internet  
Médicaments - Internet

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**The Internet and Medicines**  
**Enjoy the Internet : but don't risk your health !**

More and more people surf the Internet. It is interesting, even exciting. Conversations can be held worldwide, experiences exchanged and much valuable information obtained on an unlimited range of topics.

But it has proved to be very difficult to apply to the Internet, the kind of effective controls that are used to outlaw offensive or objectionable practices in newspapers and magazines or on radio or television.

Medicines are promoted on the Internet. The doctors and pharmacists of Europe want to warn you of some of the dangers of buying medicines through the net to help you to decide whether it is wise to do so.

Medicines are special products.

The strict controls over marketing, advertising and sales of medicines at national and European level demonstrate that governments recognise that medicines are special. These controls are designed to protect your health. They can be completely undermined by unwise use of the Internet.

The World Health Organisation too has concerns about the situation.

For your protection, a medicine can only be marketed in a member state of the EU when it has met strict criteria for quality, safety and effectiveness. Storage is carefully controlled at manufacturer, wholesaler and pharmacy levels to ensure that medicines remain effective when they are supplied. Bad storage can cause deterioration, and risks to health.

You need to be sure that you receive the right medicine for your condition, that you understand how to take or use that medicine and the possible side effects you may encounter. In every country in Europe doctors and pharmacists ensure you have convenient access to all this information – and medicines that are safe and effective when used properly.

If you order medicines through the Internet :

- There is no face-to-face contact with a doctor or pharmacist to ensure the choice of medicine is right for you.
- There is no doctor or pharmacist to answer your questions about possible side effects or interactions with other medicines you are taking.

- You may find it very difficult or impossible to obtain reimbursement under your national health insurance system for a product that would normally be fully or part reimbursed.
- There is no guarantee that the medicine you receive will meet the required standards for quality, safety and effectiveness even if the advertisement claims that it does.
- The website may be in one country and the supply source for the medicine in one far distant. So you may find the labelling of the product or the leaflet, if there is one, is in a language you cannot read.
- You could already be taking a medicine with the same active ingredient as the one described as “new” that you order and, without knowing it, be taking a higher dose than is safe.
- A medicine from another country may have a very similar name to one you know but a completely different active ingredient.
- The advertisement you saw may not have been subject to any controls and could therefore have made extravagant claims of near miraculous effects which are quite untrue.
- The medicine advertised may be counterfeit with authentic-looking packaging but no active ingredient.
- You have no guarantee that the medicine has not deteriorated because of improper storage or delays in transit.
- If you have a problem you may find it very difficult to pursue a claim against a seller in another country.

The World Health Organisation has recognised the dangers and is concerned about the situation. The 1997 World Health Assembly voted to set up a study on cross-border advertising, promotion and sales of medicines using the Internet. The same topic was the subject of more expressions of serious concern at the 1998 Assembly.

There is sound information about health and medicines in databases on the Internet established by responsible scientific and consumer organisations. Naturally you will want to have as much good information as possible about your health and the medicines you might take.

**Enjoy the Internet but don't risk your health by using it to order medicines.**