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On 24 November 2012, the CPME Board adopted the "CPME Statement on Non-prescription medicines" (CPME 2012/145 FINAL)

CPME Statement on
Non-prescription medicines

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) aims to promote the highest standards of medical training and medical practice in order to achieve the highest quality of health care for all patients in Europe. CPME is also concerned with the promotion of public health, the relationship between patients and doctors and the free movement of doctors within the European Union. CPME represents the national medical associations of 27 countries in Europe and works closely with the national medical associations of countries that have applied for EU membership as well as specialized European medical associations.

The platform on Access to Medicines in Europe was created by the European Commission in 2010, as one of the work areas of the process on Corporate Responsibility in the field of pharmaceuticals. The platform is dedicated to enhancing the collaboration among the EU Member States and relevant stakeholders in order to find common, non-regulatory approaches to timely and equitable access to medicines after their market authorisation.

The Project group on promoting good governance of non-prescription medicines in the EU is one of the initiatives of this Platform. It aims at identifying the elements to ensure availability, uptake, and informed use and choice of non-prescription medicines, including medicines after a change of classification. CPME is part of the Project group and represents doctors' position on the matter.

CPME acknowledges the importance of non-prescription medicines in the European market in relieving the health services in a positive way. To this end, CPME issued already in February 1997 a position paper together with UEMO, UEMS, PGEU and AESGP. It was agreed that *"all parties associated with self-medication must seek to ensure that all medicines supplied without medical prescription are appropriate for the user and that sufficient and relevant information is given to provide maximum therapeutic benefit and safety in use."*
To this end, medical professionals believe that the use of non-prescription medicines should take place in a framework where high quality of care and patient safety is a priority. It is to be noted also that certain drugs must remain prescriptive medicines, and therefore should not be classified as Over the counter medicines (e.g. Antibiotics).

Therefore, CPME calls upon the Commission and national governments to ensure that the following concerns are taken into account into any future regulatory and non-regulatory action regarding non-prescription medicines:

1. The risks of "self-diagnosis"

While recognising the importance for patients to take an active role in managing their health, CPME stresses that having recourse to a non-prescription medicine should in no way lead to inappropriate self-medication. Great attention must be given to avoid situations of a risky "self-diagnosis" which become an issue of patient safety. The proper use of a non-prescription medicine is therefore essential. Empowered patients should be able to rely on the fact that physicians provide assistance, advice and information about self-medication.

2. The importance for the patient to be well informed

CPME believes that delivering accurate information to the patient is an integral part of health literacy and a corner stone for better health outcomes. In this view, doctors play a central role with regard to the informed use and the proper choice of the non-prescription medicine by the patient.

However, CPME is concerned about the growing phenomenon of advertising of non-prescription medicines. This unfortunately can lead to confusion between commercial objectives and exact information on the use of the medicine. Patients might therefore not be able to make informed choices. There is a need to ensure safety and reliability of information on pharmaceuticals for patients. High quality information and professional advice should always be preferred to advertising.
In this respect, the package leaflet must contain adequate indications on necessary medical consultation.

Only informed patients are enabled to play an active role in the quality and safety process. Doctors therefore play a vital role in turning information on medicines into patient knowledge about medicines.

3. High quality care before any economic consideration

While there is a need to facilitate market access of medicines by removing barriers, this should not imply endangering safety standards.
CPME warns about the risk of neglecting high quality care when economic constraints arise. While understanding that national health services are constantly confronted with economic and budgetary pressure, patient safety should not be put at risk. Assessing the use of non-prescription medicines and considering its optimisation and extension in the European market can be seen as necessary, but it should in no way become a substitute to the access to high quality care and services.