

General Policy Topics

WHO's Revised Drug Strategy

In May 1986 the World Health Assembly approved WHO's Revised Drug Strategy which seeks to:

1. Support governments in formulating and implementing national drug policies and action programmes on essential drugs. The advisory functions of the Organization have assumed a strong socioeconomic dimension with the promotion of the essential drugs concept and the promulgation of the Model List of Essential Drugs.

2. Expand WHO's normative functions. Since its inception the Organization has exercised a normative function in relation to nomenclature (International Nonproprietary Names), standards of manufacture and quality assurance of pharmaceutical products. More recently it has supported governments in their regulatory function by promulgating the WHO Certification Scheme on the Quality of Pharmaceutical Products moving in International Commerce, by disseminating information on national regulatory decisions of global relevance and by developing the International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities as a forum for advancing collaboration and harmonization.

3. Intensify dissemination of information by broadening the scope of the drug information bulletin, producing it more frequently and ensuring its availability in developing countries.

4. Promote better basic education and training of health personnel in the rational use of drugs, promote clinical pharmacology as a discipline relevant to primary health care, provide fellowships and sponsor seminars.

5. Promote collaborative research aimed at developing badly needed drugs in all priority health areas to complement the Organization's existing involvement in tropical diseases, diarrhoeal diseases and human reproduction.

An integral part of the strategy is the *international exchange of information through the drug information bulletin* which was started more than ten years ago as a vehicle for disseminating information on drugs on a selective, pragmatic basis. Since 1981, it has been complemented by a "monthly mailing" to national drug regulatory authorities. Over the years the bulletin has proved to be useful, although it is recognized that timely dissemination has been hampered by delays in receiving relevant information from Member States and also by the lack of staff responsible for its compilation. Now, in accordance with WHO's Revised Drug Strategy, it will assume a new dimension.

The bulletin will disseminate information from national and international sources. It will cover economic aspects of drug use and procurement in addition to providing details and background to regulatory decisions. A new section devoted to essential drugs will shortly be introduced to include updated versions of model information sheets and invite suggestions for further revisions. The sheets should be regarded as illustrative since they are intended for adaptation by countries wishing to develop prescribing information for doctors and other health workers.

This first issue of *WHO Drug Information* attempts to carry out the tasks now assigned to the bulletin in the international transfer of information on current drug issues.