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Press release

Information on prescription drugs: MEPs press for stronger patients' rights

Patients must have better access to high quality information on prescription drugs in the future, MEPs decided on Tuesday. Objective information on a drug's characteristics and the health conditions it is intended to treat should be among the details given, said the EP Environment Committee. At the same time, MEPs want to protect patients from unsolicited information on medicines.

The basic aim of the legislation drafted by the Commission is to ensure the availability of good-quality, objective, reliable and non-promotional information on medicines. However, the Environment Committee voted today to emphasise patients' rights to information rather than making the provision of information an option for the pharmaceutical companies, as the Commission suggested.

In the reports drafted by Christofer Fjellner (EPP, SE), the committee wants to specify which data must be made available to the public by pharmaceutical firms, which information is optional and through which channels it is to be supplied. It also wants Member States to be required to give citizens objective and unbiased information on medicines.

Member States' obligation to provide information

MEPs introduced a new article into the legislation, which obliges Member States to ensure that "objective, unbiased information" is available to the general public on medicinal products sold in that Member State. At least the following would have to be made available:

- a summary of product characteristics, a labelling and package leaflet and a publicly accessible version of the assessment report of the medicinal product;
- the diseases and health conditions which are to be treated with the medicinal product;
- information on how to prevent such diseases and conditions.

Such information would have to be made available both in electronic form (on dedicated websites set up by the Member State) and in printed form, and in a format accessible for people with disabilities.

Information by pharmaceutical companies

MEPs also voted that pharmaceutical companies should be *required*, and not just have the option as in the Commission proposal, to make available the approved and most recent contents of summaries of product characteristics, labelling and package leaflet and a publicly accessible version of the assessment report.

In addition, pharmaceutical companies *may* provide the general public with other well-defined non-promotional information, for example on the environmental impact of the product or on prices or pack changes, or instructions for use of the product, although they would need prior authorisation from the competent authorities.

This information would have to be supplied both in electronic and printed form, and, MEPs add, in formats appropriate for the blind and partially-sighted. Printed material may only be sent to members of the public at their specific request. The Commission had proposed that information on prescription drugs should not be broadcast on radio or TV. MEPs voted that it should also not be published in newspapers or magazines.

The two legislative reports were adopted today by overwhelming majorities in committee and the plenary votes are scheduled for December.

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