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Patients can't wait any longer for action on medicine shortages

New recommendations from EPHA to tackle the EU medicine shortages crisis

Brussels, 27 April 2020. The increasing levels of medicine shortages across Europe pose severe threats to patient outcomes, patient safety and patient care, the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and a number of its members representing patient and disease groups warn today. This comes on the occasion of the publication of a series of recommendations setting out how the EU and national governments should together be urgently responding to this pressing cross-border threat.

The current COVID-19 crisis has brought the issue of medicine shortages to a head, echoing warnings from the [Standing Committee of European Doctors](#) last week. On top of shortages because of production and capacity issues, or due to commercial decisions, supply issues are now occurring for medicines used to treat patients with COVID-19, including in ICU, with devastating impacts both for COVID patients and those needing these medicines for other conditions.

All European countries are affected. [EPHA's nine recommendations](#) include calls for a **permanent system for monitoring medicine shortages** in the EU to be established, as well as a new **EU Joint Action** on the issue; **early warning systems** on medicine shortages at national and European level; **mandatory shortage prevention and management plans** for all medicines marketed in more than one Member State; and **stronger EU legislation** to improve notification of medicine shortages, as well as guidance on prudent procurement practices and on when free movement of medicines may be restricted.

The effects of medicine shortages on patients and their families can be life-changing: causing significant emotional distress, disease progression and/or worsening of symptoms as a result of treatment delays; avoidable transmission of infectious diseases, and increased exposure to false medicines, which they often turn to out of desperation.

Therefore, the recommendations also call for a **new EU study to assess the impact of shortages** on patient health, treatment and care, as well as for the meaningful input from elected representatives in the European Parliament into the development of a new EU strategy to tackle the crisis.

Contributing EPHA members have also reacted to the publication.

Welcoming the publication of the recommendations, **Charlotte Roffiaen, of France Assos Santé** said, "Medicine shortages have gone out of control in most EU countries, with devastating effects on patient health. We need increased European coordination and strong EU initiatives to fight this plague, as no Member State is in a position to solve this crisis on its own."

"For over a decade, hospital pharmacists have been engaging with and raising awareness about the impact that medicine shortages have on patients. The implementation of pan-European measures that proactively and reactively address the problem cannot wait any longer. Therefore, the European



Association of Hospital Pharmacists stands in full support with the European Public Health Alliance that today puts forward a proposal outlining how Europe can jointly tackle the growing problem of medicine shortages” stated **Petr Horák, President of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP)**.

Dr Matti Aapro, President of the European Cancer Organisation added “The European Public Health Alliance’s proposed actions on medicine shortages are timely, important and useful. Let 2020 be the year when COVID-19 broke down engrained reluctance for more systematic health cooperation between countries, and a year of real progress in tackling medicine shortages.”

Ward Rommel, Chair of the Access to Medicines Task Force, Association of European Cancer Leagues commented “In recent years, European cancer patients have been increasingly affected by medicine shortages, and the situation is becoming even more serious with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As causes for shortages differ across different indications and from one country to another, there is no measure a single Member State can take to effectively address this problem. Therefore, ECL calls for a comprehensive study on the causes and the impact of medicine shortages on patients and health systems, and a timely development of EU-wide strategy to both prevent and manage ongoing issues with medicines’ supply.”

NOTES TO EDITOR

Download the paper and recommendations: <https://epha.org/position-medicine-shortages/>

About EPHA

EPHA is a change agent – Europe’s leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health civil society, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe.

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