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Health Care Without Harm Europe's work on AMR

Relevance of HCWH Europe advocacy work

Pharmaceuticals in the environment represent a global pollution problem – over 631 different pharmaceutical agents (or their metabolites) have been detected in at least 71 countries covering all continents. Pharmaceutical residues have been detected in surface water, sewage effluents, groundwater, drinking water, manure, soil, and other environmental matrices. Antibiotics in the environment can promote the development of antibiotic-resistant pathogens - a major global health threat. Also, little is known about the effects on humans from continuous, long-term exposure to low concentrations of pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceutical substances are often engineered so that they remain unchanged during their passage through the human body; unfortunately this stability means they also persist outside the human body and, as a consequence, can build up in the environment. Several studies have confirmed that medicines pose environmental risks, and that concentrations found in the environment can have detrimental effects on aquatic systems and wildlife.

Given pharmaceuticals' ability to harm the environment, concerns have been raised about how long-term chronic exposure to even small concentrations of pharmaceuticals in water sources can harm humans - especially the developing child and those with compromised immune systems. Furthermore, the ability of pharmaceuticals to accumulate in human food sources, such as fish, raises broader concerns about human exposure and the effects on health.

Antimicrobial agents have been responsible for a dramatic reduction in the number of deaths from infectious diseases over the last 70 years, however, as a result of the overuse and misuse of antimicrobial agents, we are now on the verge of a new public health crisis: antimicrobial resistance.

Figures indicate that we are already seeing the onset of resistance: the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) estimates that antimicrobial resistance results in 25,000 deaths each year in the European Union and incurs costs of over €1.5 billion in healthcare expenses and productivity losses.¹ Doctors are increasingly placed in a position where they cannot cure infected patients because the bacterium responsible for infections is resistant to the antibiotics available.

HCWH Europe's advocacy work seeks to strengthen and fully implement the Union's

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/health/antimicrobial_resistance/policy/index_en.htm

pharmaceuticals legislation, to safeguard EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing, with particular regard to:

- Supporting the development and adoption of strong regulations on veterinary medicinal products, particularly the adoption of regulations that introduce a policy of regular renewal of all authorised veterinary pharmaceuticals (which also includes an environmental review scheme).
- Supporting the introduction of a monographic system that bases the environmental risk assessment on active substances and foresees a minimisation strategy for antimicrobials.
- Supporting the development of the forthcoming European Commission's Roadmap and strategy on pharmaceutical residues in the environment, incorporating key measures identified by HCWH Europe. These key measures include improving the environmental risk assessment (ERA), applying ERA to old human medicines, optimising doctors' prescription practices, implementing collection schemes, and promoting green pharmacy so that the environmental impact of pharmaceutical residues is minimised.
- Supporting pharmaceutical pollution being addressed after they have been recognised as an emerging issue at SAICM, and working with governments and experts to take practical steps: creating national action plans and enabling cross country collaboration.
- Serve as a hub for communication about the problem of pharmaceutical residues in the environment and AMR, including education of healthcare professionals, pharmacists, students, and the general public on the role that different stakeholders can play.
- Take initial steps to assess the implementation of collection schemes for unused and expired pharmaceuticals in all European countries, and assessing the shortcomings and successes of such schemes.
- Creating position papers, leaflets, infographics, and other means of information to educate policy makers and health professionals about pharmaceuticals pollution and AMR
- Participate in the stakeholder consultation for the development of a strategic approach to tackling the impact of pharmaceuticals on the environment, and provide input to the forthcoming roadmap on Pharmaceuticals in the Environment. HCWH Europe will draft position papers and letters, participate in EC stakeholders meetings, and maintain and extend its contacts with European Commission policy officials from DG Environment, DG SANCO, and DG Enterprise.
- Participate in the EC Chemicals Working Group of Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive to advocate for improved measures to address the impact of pharmaceuticals on the environment, in particular the monitoring of pharmaceutical substances.
- Mobilise the healthcare community by drafting and releasing a declaration on the problem of pharmaceutical pollution.
- Collaborate with other NGOs, the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics and the antibiotic resistance coalition (both of which HCWH is a member) to tackle the issue of pharmaceuticals in the environment and antimicrobial resistance.
- Participate in international conferences and meetings to extend the network of contacts and foster collaboration with other stakeholders.

Our workshop: '[Pharmaceuticals in the environment: Make ideas work](#)', is planned for 6th September 2016 in Brussels, and will feature a number of high calibre speakers.

The relevance of this issue is reflected by the record number of presentation proposals for [CleanMed Europe](#) this year. Hosted in the UN City in Copenhagen in October 2016, CleanMed Europe covers all subject of sustainability in healthcare, such as procurement, energy, waste, food, and others. This year there will be 4 sessions (12 speakers) solely dedicated to pharmaceuticals and AMR alone.

- A1: Pharmaceuticals in the environment: next steps in Europe
- B1: Antimicrobial resistance: the environmental impact
- C2: Addressing pharmaceutical pollution: green and sustainable practices
- D1: Reducing pharmaceutical pollution through new strategies: case studies

Currently the HCWH team is working with the ARC team on briefing UN delegations as Member States will be convening a High-Level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) during the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2016. This represents an important opportunity for governments to put forward a framework for addressing the looming challenge of antimicrobial resistance. It is critical that Member States commit to:

Finally, HCWH Europe is updating its own position paper on pharmaceuticals in the environment and antimicrobial resistance to reflect recent science and policy developments.

Effectiveness of HCWH Europe advocacy work

HCWH Europe has become a recognised stakeholder in the debate on pharmaceuticals in the environment and AMR and being called upon to present their work at European and global level. HCWH is a recognised EMA stakeholder in the healthcare professionals working party and has participated in a number of consultations. Through our work we have been invited to speak at the [Uppsala Health Summit](#) 'A world without antibiotics', 2-3 June 2015 in Uppsala, addressing the UN delegates at the [ICCM4](#), on Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical Pollutants in Geneva in October 2015 and addressing EU policy makers at an event in the European Parliament: [Pharma pollution](#): an ignored cause of antimicrobial resistance, December 2015 in Brussels and [Antimicrobial resistance](#), a workshop organised by Politico in Brussels in February 2016.

HCWH also participated in the [European Antibiotic Awareness Day in 2015](#) and created a number of infographics and blogs, using social media to spread the message.

HCWH Europe measures its effectiveness by the content that policy makers take on board. We are pleased that the ICCM4 has adopted Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical Pollutants as an emerging issue. HCWH Europe has been involved in this process for a number of years.

HCWH Europe's [information leaflet](#): *How doctors can help reduce pharmaceutical pollution* has been widely downloaded and distributed and requests have been made to have this leaflet available in other EU languages - a [German](#) version currently exists with other

languages planned. HCWH Europe experiences a high demand for this leaflet, so consequently it had to be reprinted and it is being distributed at conferences and meetings.

In order to increase effectiveness and to facilitate collaboration and learning HCWH has set up a global NGO email discussion list on safer pharma in 2016.

Transferability of HCWH Europe advocacy work

HCWH work recognises the global connectivity of the challenges we face on pharmaceutical pollution and antimicrobial resistance, therefore HCWH makes the work available in a transparent way on its website and shares information, so it can be transferred and adapted wherever health professionals work. It is HCWH's role as an association to provide education and information to the health sector and policy makers to enable informed decision-making based on sound science. HCWH is serving the public in the interest of the greater good for improvements in at European and global level. HCWH actively encourages sharing of knowledge among different stakeholders to find solutions for the worlds most pressing needs. HCWH welcomes and encourages others to work with the material the organisation has created, adapt it to their local needs, to create change on the ground.

Sustainability of HCWH Europe advocacy work

This year HCWH is celebrating its 20 anniversary. HCWH Europe is part of HCWH Global, which has four regional offices (Europe, North America, Latin America, and Asia) and over 500 members around the world. Even though HCWH Europe has full constitutional autonomy from the other HCWH offices, it is closely connected to the global HCWH campaigns as it participates in the decision-making council responsible for developing the international campaigns. For example, the HCWH [Global Green and Healthy Hospitals project](#) implements environmental sustainability in the healthcare sector globally, engaging 9,500 hospitals, health systems, and medical associations all over the world. The Global Green and Healthy Hospitals project has a particular work strand on pharmaceuticals and AMR is addressed in the food, water, and waste strands of the campaign.

HCWH Europe was set up in April 2003 and has been growing both in capacity and the number of policy issues it addresses. HCWH Europe's dedicated and highly motivated team works with members which are hospitals, healthcare systems, medical associations, local and regional authorities, academic and research institutions, environmental consultancies, environmental, and health organisations. While not all members work on policy, most work on implementing policy and providing care for the citizens of Europe - their local experience is key for HCWH's work in Brussels. The data informs and enriches HCWH's advocacy work.

HCWH was set up by 20 committed doctors, nurses and environmentalists who had a vision, based on the Hippocrates oath, that the healthcare sector has to lead by example. First do no harm, is the moral obligation for the sector to heal without harming the patient and the environment. The organisation continues to 'punch above its weight', working with

a small budget towards the vision that healthcare mobilises its ethical, economic, and political influence to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable, and healthy world.

Intersectoral collaboration of HCWH Europe advocacy work

HCWH focuses on sustainability in healthcare and since a number of different sectors provide goods for healthcare, it is only natural that intersectoral collaboration occurs. HCWH is in conversation with energy companies, architects, designers, furniture and floor companies, medical device companies, pharmaceutical companies, water companies, food companies, and others - all providing goods and services to the healthcare sector. Through HCWH's members, the office is in contact with cities and regions, such as Stockholm and Vienna. Through HCWH's advocacy work, the organisation is in touch with both health and environment ministers, as well as the EU institutions. At the global level HCWH and the UN have a long working relationship, dating back to 2002, including collaborations with the WHO, UNDP, and UNEP on healthcare waste, mercury substitution, climate change, and green procurement. Thus intersectoral collaboration is a part of HCWH's work: it enables the organisation to understand the complex nature of healthcare provision, understand the supply change, challenges faced and working with the various sectors to find innovative and transferable solutions, sharing lessons learned from success as well as failure.

Innovation and creativity of HCWH Europe advocacy work

The founding of HCWH was an innovative and creative way of looking at the challenges of pollution and connecting it with health. The phrase "environmental health" has been steadily developed and used by the HCWH team to describe the notion that we need a healthy environment to have healthy people on a healthy planet.

HCWH encourages new ideas that challenge existing ways of thinking and working, and challenges the health sector to respond to the challenges of our time with climate change being the greatest threat to public health. It is the deep understanding of HCWH that we only have one planet and one health that encompass both human and veterinary (environmental) health: we live in an interconnected and interdependent world. The impact of pharmaceutical production on the environment, and the risk of AMR in China and India, has an impact on our health in the Western world and we have an interest in working together to improve good manufacturing practices for the outcome of all.

HCWH encourages innovative projects by its members that address challenges they're facing through pilot projects and sharing best practice. As part of the Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) project HCWH created the [GGHH connect platform](#) that allows healthcare workers to connect on a given subject, such as pharmaceuticals, which enables discussion, sharing of reports, etc. This innovative and interactive platform enables borderless discussion and interaction.

Using new and innovative communication tools, such as the connect platform, webinars, infographics, and social media has allowed HCWH to extend its reach beyond imagination. The Internet has enabled health workers wherever they are to find HCWH and to use its

materials to apply change locally. The last [webinar](#): Safer pharma: how healthcare can reduce pharmaceutical pollution was attended by over 100 people. The recording has been accessed since and allows HCWH's work on pharmaceuticals to be shared beyond a one off event. Through the collaboration with International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA), HCWH is able to connect to the next generation of doctors that will have to face the challenges that we have failed to solve, mainly climate change, limited resources, pharmaceutical pollution, and AMR among others. The young generation also challenges HCWH to reflect on its work and adapt to the changing landscape of policy development.

HCWH applies the European reality in practice: the HCWH Europe team is diverse and comprises of 11 people from 10 different countries, four men and seven women, with an average age of 34.5 years. HCWH provides an enabling workplace. This diverse team with different cultural backgrounds and languages enables creative thinking, testing out ideas in internal discussion. As a reflection more team members are using the blog format to present their campaigns and issues they work on. HCWH believes that this is reflected in the improvement of its communication work.

Conclusion

HCWH Europe has identified the challenges of pharmaceuticals in the environment and antimicrobial resistance, and adapted its campaigns and advocacy work in consultation with its members and board as a result. HCWH uses the whole toolbox of advocacy to reach its target audience of policy makers and healthcare workers. HCWH Europe measures its impact and success by the uptake of its demands in policy and by the activities reported back by health professionals. HCWH Europe takes note that the awareness of pharmaceuticals in the environment and AMR is continuously rising, and health workers want clear guidance and options for change, that enables them to take active steps at their workplace. HCWH Europe will continue its effort to raise awareness and change policy in the interest of all citizens.