

ALTROCONSUMO COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSAL OF INFORMATION TO PATIENTS

ALTROCONSUMO, one of the major independent consumer organizations in Italy, has serious concerns about the possible consequences that would derive from the implementation of the ideas now present in the legislative proposal outlined in the consultation paper "Legal proposal on Information to Patients", launched on 5 February 2008¹ by the Commission.

Upon the intentions of the consultation document, all direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines would continue to be prohibited while pharmaceutical industries, instead, would be able to provide "information" about these medicines directly to the public.

Despite the attempt outlined in the Commission document, making a clear-cut distinction between information and advertising is simply impossible.

The information provided by pharmaceutical industry would be inevitably biased because of the conflict of interests due to the profit activity they are committed to, versus the non-profit aim that should underpin any information to the public related to prescription based medicines and drugs in general.

We have seen in many occasions² that information provided by industry even if can be judged as objective, it's still **biased by omission** and therefore promotional.

Clear examples of these practices are available around the world, and the issue has become one of the most worrisome for the consumers movement worldwide, so much worrisome that Consumers International³ has recently launched a campaign⁴ against drug promotion, illustrating the technique and strategies used by the pharmaceutical industry to "inform" the public, the media and the doctors.

Furthermore, it still has to be proved that patient and consumers need more

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/pharmaceuticals/pharmacos/docs/doc2008/2008_02/info_to_patients_consult_200802.pdf

² See our publications "*promozione scorretta*" Salutest n.65, December '06; "*pillola annulla stanchezza? Meglio un bel sonno*" Salutest n.63, August '06; "*A caccia di Malati*" Salutest n.61, April '06; "*prevenzione o diagnosi precoce*" Salutest n.49, April 2004.

³ Consumers International (CI) is a federation of consumer organisations. It currently represents 230 organisations in 113 countries. For more information, see: www.consumersinternational.org

⁴ For details about CI's campaign see: www.marketingoverdose.org

information on drugs. For sure they need more independent, reliable and better quality information, a kind of information that can allow them to make an informed choice based on the possibility to compare different medicines and also different treatment options.

The consultation document on the legal proposal, instead, explicitly excludes comparison; it focuses on medicinal products only and not on other treatments and it doesn't address the question of the information source liability.

In overall terms, we strongly believe that allowing pharmaceutical companies to provide information directly to the public will not solve the problems consumers face in accessing high quality health information, will not help them to make an informed choice, will have a cumulative "dis-educational" effect and will not lead to better health outcomes.

For a deeper discussion and analyses of the contents of the Consultation document of the Commission, we would refer the readers (and the Commission services too) to the document that Beuc⁵ (the European Consumers' organization Altroconsumo belongs to) has put forward on behalf of its members on this topic, the content of which we share completely.

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⁵ See **Beuc/X/21/2008** available on Beuc website: www.beuc.org. BEUC, Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs was created on 6 March 1962. Nowadays, members of Beuc include 41 well respected, independent national consumer organizations from some thirty European countries (EU, EEA and applicant countries).