

October 2011

Dear Mr Dalli,

Drug Shortages

As I am sure you are aware, for some years there have been occasional but frequent shortages of medicines in the UK caused by parallel trading. For a full account of the situation, please see the attached paper.

York LINK (Local Involvement Network for Health and Social Services), which is a government-supported voluntary organization for patients, carers and consumers in York (replicated throughout the country) has followed developments with some frustration.

When these shortages occur, patients and carers - as well as community pharmacists - expend a great deal of time and energy trying to ensure continuity of supply and, in the process, suffer much unnecessary stress.

Although parallel trading is legal, it is equally true that pharmaceutical wholesalers have a professional moral obligation to ensure adequate supplies to the home market.

The UK follows European Guidance on Good Distribution Practice 94/C63/03 which, although it states that “the system should ensure that the right products are delivered to the right addressee within a satisfactory time period”, does not specify to whom it should be satisfactory nor what a satisfactory time period would be. York LINK considers that it should be satisfactory to the consumer and that 24 hours would be an appropriate deadline for delivery. In that case wholesalers would be obliged to maintain higher stocks than they do at present to ensure they could comply with the Guidance.

We have asked Mr Lansley, UK Secretary of State for Health, to apply this interpretation immediately but we feel that the European Guidance should be amended to include a definition of the terms “satisfactory” and “time period”. We know that parallel trading causes shortages of pharmaceuticals in different European countries at different times depending on the value of the EURO vis-à-vis the currencies of member states not using the EURO. Therefore, all members of the European Union would benefit ultimately.

York LINK would be grateful if you would set the wheels in motion for such a relatively simple change and keep us informed of progress.

Yours truly,

Lesley Pratt
Chair, York LINK

Mr John Dalli
European Commissioner
for Health and Consumer Policy
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

cc: Andreas Pott
Acting Executive Director
European Medicines Agency
7 Westferry Circus
Canary Wharf
London E14 4HB