

The Finnish Social Insurance Institution

Research Department

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European commission

Enterprise and industry directorate-general

Consumer goods

Pharmaceuticals

Public consultation: Legal proposal on information to patients

- The aims of the paper are important: the public shall receive enough good-quality, objective, reliable and non-promotional information on prescription-only medicines and their correct use. The access to such information should be equal in all member states.
- It is rather surprising, that the paper gives only one solution to the present problem in informing patients and general public about concerns in public health and major disease: allowing drug industry to prepare and distribute information about their prescription medicines.
- Distinguishing between non-promotional information and pure marketing is very difficult, if the main source of information is drug industry, which principally aims to increase sales of medicinal products.
- The general population would certainly need more information on right use of the medicines, self care of minor illnesses, monitoring long-term diseases, and benefits and adverse effects of drugs. Providing this kind of balanced information is not in the major interest of the industry.
- The drug industry has been active in informing the physicians and marketing their products directly to health professionals. These campaigns are often planned on international basis, and they consist of various components, one part directed also to general public or specified patient groups.
- During the 2000's, drug industry has been launching several information campaigns focused on various diseases. In connection of these, also useful information to the patients and general public has been distributed. The main aim, however, seems always to be direct or indirect promotion of certain prescription medicines. This becomes visible in the selecting the disease which is being handled – if the company markets, say, a HPV-vaccine, it informs about cervical cancer, but not about other forms of female malignancies, although their occurrence and public health impor-

tance would be far higher. The disease is presented as more prevalent and dangerous than what is the real public health importance. The solution comes from a certain product, and other means to tackle the problem are not touched.

- Even though some patients benefit from new pharmaceutical innovations, marketing prescription medicines directly or indirectly may promote also unnecessary use, which would create extra costs and adverse effects.
- Finland has a long experience of self-regulation in the control of marketing. In addition to the National Agency for Medicines, a body consisting of independent experts has been studying information and advertising given by drug industry. Each year around 10-15 campaigns have been forced to be interrupted, and one of the major reasons for this has been indirect marketing of prescription medicines to general public. Instead of setting up new national co-regulatory bodies to monitor patient information provided by the drug industry, these resources could be used to provide objective information to citizens by objective and academic professionals.
- The drug industry should not be allowed to inform patients about their prescription medicines. At present, drug industry is allowed to provide the patient with the officially granted product summary as well as with patient information leaflet.

Timo Klaukka, MD, Ph.D.  
 Chief of Health Research  
 Research Professor  
 Research Department  
 The Social Insurance Institution  
 Finland

Leena Saastamoinen, Ph.D. (pharm.)  
 Senior Researcher  
 Research Department  
 The Social Insurance Institution  
 Finland