New global mechanism to combat Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit medical products

On 21 November 2012, representatives from 65 Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union agreed to promote the strengthening of national regulatory capacity to combat Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit Medical Products. They further agreed to identify actions and behaviours that result in Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit Medical Products in order to secure access to high-quality, safe medicines.

The First Meeting of the Member State Mechanism on Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit Medical Products, organized by WHO and the Argentine Ministry of Health, ended with a call to countries to jointly address this global public health issue that affects millions of people worldwide.

The 200 representatives at the meeting agreed on a workplan that highlights the importance of cooperation between different national authorities, and the sharing of best practices and experiences.

They agreed to establish a global committee comprising of two delegates from each WHO region to support the implementation of the workplan. This provides for the enhancement of national regulatory bodies through capacity-building and networking.

The meeting also stressed the need to develop educational initiatives targeted at consumers, health professionals and industry to prevent Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit Medical Products. It called for the development of methodologies and instruments to obtain more accurate information on the nature and magnitude of the problem.

Participants advocated the establishment of guidelines on how to respond to the detection of SSFFC medicines and on securing the distribution chain to avoid the infiltration of SSFFC medical products.

The manufacture, distribution and sale of substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/falsified/counterfeit medical products (SSFFC) is a problem that endangers the health of the population of all regions and Member States, and impacts on the credibility of the health services.

Globalization, free trade and Internet technology have all affected in the way in which patients obtain their medicines, and have made it more complex for national regulatory authorities to effectively control the distribution systems in their countries. Through this mechanism WHO will help to strengthen national and regional capacities by developing strategies to prevent SSFFC medical products reaching patients.

A Member State mechanism on substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/falsified/counterfeit medical products was established in May 2011 by the World Health Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. The goal: to promote international collaboration on strategies to address the falsification of medicines from the standpoint of public health, excluding trade and intellectual property considerations.

The November meeting took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was attended by Dr Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization, and presided over by the Ambassador of Nigeria to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva, Mr Umunna Humphrey Orjiako.