

## Unified patent litigation system

Since 2007, Member State experts and interested parties have been discussing creating a Unified Patent Litigation System (UPLS). The court structure to be established would have jurisdiction concerning the infringement and validity of European and Community patents. A broad consensus is now emerging on the main features and the basic tasks of such a UPLS such as a single appeal instance and a role of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) aimed at providing a consistent interpretation and application of Community law.

In terms of pharmaceutical products, the current complex, uncertain and expensive patent framework leads to delays in patient access to generic medicines and increases their cost. Any decision regarding a patent covering a medicine will have great financial impact, not only on the companies involved, but also on consumers and Member State healthcare systems.

The European Generic medicines Association, EGA, is lobbying to strengthen these proposals in the interests of the generics industry. Its position paper on the European Patent Court is available at [www.egagenerics.com](http://www.egagenerics.com).

## Wide variation in antibiotic prescribing in primary care

A study of 3,402 patients presenting 13 European countries with a cough suggestive of lower respiratory tract infection, revealed inconsistency in the type of antibiotic and likelihood of being prescribed an antibiotic. At the same time, 28-day diaries showed a similar rate of recovery for patients who were and were not prescribed antibiotics (coefficient  $-0.01$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) once clinical presentation was taken into account.

Antibiotics were prescribed for 53% of patients overall, but ranged from 20% to nearly 90% across the networks. For example, patients in Hungary, Italy, Poland Slovakia and UK were at least twice as likely to be prescribed antibiotics — with those in Belgium, Norway and Sweden at least four times less likely to be prescribed antibiotics — compared with the overall average.

Variation in clinical presentation does not explain the considerable variation in antibiotic prescribing for acute cough in Europe. Variation in antibiotic prescribing is not associated with clinically important differences in recovery.

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## EMA recommends withdrawal of dextropropoxyphene

Finalising a safety and efficacy review the agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) concluded that the risks, particularly the risk of potentially fatal overdose, are greater than the benefits of dextropropoxyphene-containing medicines. The committee therefore recommended that the marketing authorisations for these medicines be withdrawn across the European Union. The withdrawal will be gradual to allow time for the safe transfer of patients to appropriate alternative therapies, in line with national recommendations.

The analgesic has been available as a prescription-only medicine for about 40 years, either on its own or in combination primarily with paracetamol, as tablets, capsules, suppositories and solutions for injection. There have been concerns over intentional and accidental fatal overdose for some years and a number of Member States had carried out independent safety reviews of these medicines. Some Member States have already withdrawn dextropropoxyphene-containing medicines from their markets.

The decision will be made legally binding by the European Commission.

[www.emea.europa.eu](http://www.emea.europa.eu) EMEA/401062/2009

## Russia in OECD membership negotiations

Russia has formally launched negotiations for accession to the OECD. Welcoming this, Mr Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary General, noted that by engaging in membership talks, Russia in effect commits to continue reforming its economy in line with international practices. This important event confirms the strategic course of Russia towards integration into the world economic system and its key institutions.

Mr Gurría was also convinced that these reviews would provide valuable support for ongoing reforms in Russia. "The role of the OECD is to help member countries and others develop appropriate and effective policies to improve the workings of market economies," he said.

Russia is taking part in this year's OECD ministerial meeting, focused on "The Crisis and beyond: building a stronger, cleaner, fairer world economy", along with the four other countries negotiating accession to the OECD - Chile, Estonia, Israel and Slovenia and the five that participate in a process of 'enhanced engagement' with the OECD - Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa.

[www.oecd.org/accession](http://www.oecd.org/accession)