

European Commission news

Healthcare lobbyists have scored a major victory. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso gave responsibility for pharmaceuticals to the new health commissioner when he unveiled his new team of commissioners for the coming five years.

The move angered pharmaceutical industry lobbyists who have consistently resisted such a move. Medicines had been controlled by DG enterprise and industry but health non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have argued that medicines policy comes under the health departments in almost all Member States.

The new EU Health Commissioner, Mr John Dalli from Malta, will now be responsible for the European Medicines Agency, as well as being in charge of the biotechnology, pesticides and health unit, which moves from the Commission's environment section.

The Commission has spent more than a year investigating competition issues in the pharmaceutical sector. The investigation was launched in January 2008 in response to concerns that fewer new medicines were being brought to market, amid allegations that generic drugs were being delayed from reaching consumers. Tensions were high following raids on top pharmaceutical companies in January and November 2008.

A damning preliminary report was published in November 2008, which alleged that anti-competitive practices in the sector are hampering innovation and blocking the entry of cheap generics into the European market. But the final report was more nuanced and the Commission and the industry managed to agree in some areas. However, the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) continues to gripe that 'the report contains an extended litany of generic grievances, many of which are unfounded or unsubstantiated'.

www.euractiv.com

World Diabetes Day

World Diabetes Day raises global awareness of diabetes – its escalating rates around the world and how to prevent the illness in most cases. Started by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and WHO, the day is celebrated on 14 November to mark the birthday of Frederick Banting who, along with Charles Best, was instrumental in the discovery of insulin in 1922, a life-saving treatment for diabetes patients. In 2007, it became an official United Nations World Health Day.

WHO estimates that more than 220 million people worldwide have diabetes. This number is likely to more than double by 2030 without intervention. Almost 80% of diabetes deaths occur in low and middle-income countries. There is an emerging global epidemic of diabetes that can be traced back to rapid increases in overweight, obesity and physical inactivity. So most people with diabetes in low and middle income countries are middle-aged (45–64), not elderly (65+). Lack of awareness about diabetes, combined with insufficient access to health services, can lead to complications such as blindness, amputation and kidney failure.

The incidence of type 1 diabetes, which usually starts in childhood, is now three times the level of the 1950s and is increasing at around 2.4% per year. The reasons are not known.

www.who.int/diabetes/en/index.html

EMA takes a further step in interaction with patients and consumers

Recognising that patients and consumers bring a unique perspective and contribute to discussions on the real-life implications of regulatory decisions, the Management Board of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) has endorsed a new strategy to further involve patients and consumers in the work of the Agency.

The proposed new strategy will considerably widen the scope of patients' and consumers' contribution to the Agency. This includes consultation during benefit–risk evaluation of medicines, participation as observers in meetings of the Pharmacovigilance Working Party and contribution to the Agency's safety communication.

www.ema.europa.eu/

More checks for laboratories running animal tests

Laboratories that use animals in scientific experiments will be subject to spot checks, following an agreement to update an EU law on animal testing. The agreement, reached on 7 December 2009, was endorsed by ministers on 15 December 2009. Under the new rules, national governments will have to inspect one-third of all laboratories using animals, with some unannounced inspections. This new regime will become law in 2010, as final agreement is delayed by the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009. The treaty brings new powers for the European Parliament for all laws decided by agriculture ministers.

Ms Elisabeth Jeggle, the German centre-right MEP who led the Parliament side in the negotiations, said that "the institutions had found a balanced compromise that strengthens animal welfare while allowing vitally important research, including basic research, to continue in Europe and not in countries where animal welfare standards are much lower".

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