
CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-CARE IN HEALTH POLICY

Constructing the future

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It is a great honour and pleasure and at the same time a tremendous challenge to take over the chairmanship of the World Self-Medication Industry.

It is almost twenty years ago that a Japanese representative chaired this federation, and many of you may remember the very able way in which Mr Tsumura led the association. Indeed it is interesting to see that less than twenty years ago, the concept of responsible self-medication was far less accepted than today. Since then, the world in general and also particularly the pharmaceutical field has been through considerable changes. Now on the eve of the new Millennium, thanks to the different health policies developed both by international bodies such as the World Health Organization and by many national authorities, "individual responsibility" for health has become a major requirement for promoting public health, and we are seeing a solid self-medication industry around the globe which is prepared to continue and expand its service to the public.

Today we have a firm basis for our sector. However, the potential benefits of responsible self-medication do not seem to be fully analysed and exploited, and therefore it is worth considering how we can construct the future. Considering this, the General Assembly program in the last 2 days, namely yesterday's "Social and Economic Value of self-medication" and this morning's "Information Age Healthcare and The Informed Consumer" were extremely meaningful. This assembly has been the opportunity to provide you with a kind of architectural plan for the construction of a larger house with solid walls and with space for everybody. The Guiding Principles, which you will all have found in the folders at this meeting, will be our basic document for promoting appropriate regulation and shall be the basis for many further considerations with our partners all over the world. It should help channel the pressure which we are all experiencing from an economic as well as from a social viewpoint, in order to allow "individual responsibility" in a broad but appropriate way.

At the end of this morning session, it would not be appropriate to keep you at length from what is certain to be a most interesting city tour this afternoon, and therefore I would like to concentrate on a few major elements of our future activities. I would like to highlight in particular four issues which have resulted from more recent considerations and which will lead to further more intensified activities in the future.

The first issue is "Industry activities from the viewpoint of consumers". I have mentioned about this basic attitude at the last general assembly held in Toronto. I myself, from the experiences as a top management of a pharmaceutical company, feel more and more strongly about this. The actual subject of self-medication is the consumer. Therefore, it is my belief that placing the viewpoint of the consumers at the basis of OTC industry activities will lead to the development of a healthy OTC market truly supported by the consumers. It is essential to fulfil the three rights that the consumers demand, in the promotion of self-medication; "the right to know", "the right to protect oneself" and "the right to select". In other words, we have to develop OTC products that the consumers truly wish to have and deliver clear and easy to understand product information together with the products, so that the consumers can correctly use the products based on their own judgement. The issue of how to deliver information to the consumers is being highlighted. Improvements of package labelling, package insertions and advertisement are among the issues of highest priorities.

However, such tasks cannot be accomplished by the industry alone. Let me underline, as the second issue, the importance of solid partnership-building in our sector. We have seen at this meeting the signing of a charter between the worldwide Pharmacists' Organisation, FIP and WSMI which we believe is the major basis for strengthening co-operation between two partners who evidently have a strong interest in responsible self-medication. Thanks to the initiatives of our Chairman, Mr Jamison, this charter has been developed parallel to far more intensified contacts with the medical profession, leading to the

first joint project with the World Medical Association the field of smoking cessation. We are pleased to have been granted observers status at the assemblies of the World Medical Association and we see nowadays a much better understanding from both sides for an issue which traditionally divided them. I am most confident that this good co-operation will lead to useful results and increased support for responsible self-medication by medical doctors and in particular by general practitioners. Also the necessity to enhance communication with consumer group organisations which represent the voices of the consumers, must not be forgotten.

A major development in the OTC area has been a far stronger internationalisation and globalisation, compared with the situation about 20 years ago, which I wish to touch as the third point. Today, we see a still growing number of international companies with a clear commitment to develop self-medication on an international scale. I welcome such activation of self-medication promotion in a global scale, which in the long run will bring about expansion of the OTC market. On the other hand, locally, there exist various OTC medicines and folk remedies reflecting the tradition and culture of each country, deeply rooted in the everyday life of the people. Therefore, in the course of promoting global standards and harmonisation, it is important to respect the different standpoints and actual situations of each country.

This development goes hand in hand with far more intensive discussions on an appropriate regulatory environment on an international scale. WSMI have been pleased to contribute to this development in many ways. Since the beginning of the decade we have been particularly involved in the Traditional Medicines Program of the World Health Organization (WHO) and contribute through our non-governmental organisation (NGO) status to different consultation organised by the WHO in this area. Of particular importance was the establishment of guidelines for the assessment of herbal medicines, as well as the agreement of two series of monographs of selected medicinal plants which are helping to standardise assessment and therefore facilitate international commerce. This work has been equally important for developing and developed countries and we are confident that the constructive work will continue and lead to further tangible results.

We are now looking with great interest at the establishment by the WHO of guidelines on Switch OTC, the change of legal status from prescription to non-prescription medicines. After similar guidelines were agreed upon in the European Union, it would indeed make sense to define worldwide standards. This work might also have an influence on the wide range of topics discussed in the process of the International Conference on Harmonization of Technical Requirements for the Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH). We are pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the steering committee as well as in working parties relevant

to the OTC industry and we are confident that this involvement will help the internationalisation of OTC medicines.

Finally, it is evident that our sector and our political activities do not necessarily stop when a self-medication product is no longer classified as a medicine. We have seen in some parts of the world considerable growth in the field of what is called either food supplements or dietary supplements. Based on the particular experience of our industry with such products, it is evident that our members could not just ignore trends in consumer behaviour clearly asking for these kind of products. Our political work has to accommodate these trends and several of our members as well as WSMI have agreed to define a clear commitment to represent the companies' interest also in this sector. Our overall goal in this context is to find an appropriate balance in the classification as either non-prescription medicine or food, for the best service of the people. I think that the clear establishment of our role in this sector with intensified contacts with our political partners will be a major work for the next three years.

This presentation only allows me to highlight four issues. It is evident that the activities of an association are wide-ranging and include in particular a comprehensive information service to their members on all relevant international developments. We remain committed to fulfil this role and to even strengthen the service orientation of our organisation to all our members. This will be combined with further regional meetings, in particular in Asia and the Pacific rim. Our next Asia-Pacific regional meeting is scheduled for November 2000 in Sydney, not very long after the Summer Olympic Games.

Many of you have certainly thought about how to find an appropriate way of passing into the new millennium at the end of this year. We in WSMI have already looked far beyond this line into the year 2002 when the term of my chairmanship will come to an end. This will be the occasion to invite you all to my home country and town, Tokyo, where we will organise the 14th General Assembly of WSMI from 13-15 November 2002. Those of you who attended the last Assembly should particularly return for this meeting as it will allow to show you some new parts of Tokyo. We have identified a wonderful hotel in Tokyo Bay, believe it or not opposite a small beach and an attractive exhibition area which I am sure will be of particular interest to everybody attending. Of course, this will be combined with an attractive business program, allowing you an update of the developments from around the globe and particularly from the Asian region.

Lastly, I feel braced to assume the chairmanship in Berlin in the year of the historical unification of Europe. At the same time, I am determined to try my best to contribute to "Constructing a bright future" for the further development of our industry.