

## Drug Wholesaler Visit: Harpharco

Medications are available through both legal and illegal channels; from pharmacies, hospitals, medical practitioners to the black market. The latter encourages substandard medicines. However the extent of illegal trade and counterfeiting is unknown.

Harpharco understands of the problem of sub-standard drugs and is highly aware of the need to buy from reliable sources for quality assurance. Suppliers and stocks undergo rigorous checks every three months to maintain quality standards.

The Ministry of Health is set to launch a counterfeit medicines awareness program which warns the public are the risks of taking sub-standard drugs.

Harpharco has implemented standard operating procedures to ensure the right medications are received, are correctly packaged and shipped to the right retailers.



## National Office of WHO:

We had a brief meeting with Dr. Hans Troedssen, the WHO representative in Vietnam. Dr. Troedssen was supportive of FIP/WPPF's intentions in assisting MoH and VPA in their endeavour to improve pharmaceutical sector standards.



He raised concerns about the indiscriminate supply of antibiotics and admitted rational use of medicines is still a major challenge that Vietnam is struggling with. Dr. Troedssen also supported the suggestion by WPPF of running communication training courses on the basis of 'train the trainer' to assist in improving pharmacists' practical counseling skills. The Western Pacific Region WHO has previously and successfully run a similar training course in the Philippines with Victorian College of Pharmacy lecturers, Greg Duncan and Kay Stewart, as key facilitators.



## Key Issues & Recommendations

### • Role of pharmacist

The challenge in implementing GPP is in making pharmacists and the public more aware of the need to improve pharmacy practice standards. I think a public awareness campaign is required to promote the role of pharmacists as credible sources of healthcare and medication advice, eg, "Don't leave until you KNOW!" The public needs to know that pharmacists are responsible for ensuring the medications

dispensed are for the right person, right reason, give at the right dosage and are of good quality. If we create a standard of practice that patients expect to receive when they go to the pharmacy, that puts an obligation on the pharmacist to ensure they have adequate skills and sound knowledge to practice professionally.

### ● **Pharmacy education**

GPP cannot be implemented successfully, nor be sustainable, without the intention of changing the current pharmacy curriculum nation-wide to focus more on pharmaceutical care. New graduates cannot be expected to practice under GPP conditions without sound knowledge of the principles and appropriate skills eg, communication, literature reviews. Moreover, plans must be made to re-educate already registered pharmacists on the concept of patient-centre care.

Currently, only one subject relating to clinical pharmacy, namely clinical pharmacology, features on the pharmacy curriculum in Vietnam. Although the university has acknowledged that the current clinical pharmacy content is limited and requires further development, it was surprising to hear from a university teacher that the Hanoi Pharmacy University will be moving the focus of curriculum to pharmaceuticals and pharmaco-economics, as these are the most popular fields that graduates pursue.

Without a strong commitment to changing the pharmacy curriculum to teach students the clinical and pharmacy practice skills required to practice competently under the proposed legislature, the GPP project will fail.

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Ho Chi Minh City have already expressed interest in collaborating with international institutions, such as the Victorian College of Pharmacy, to assist with developing their pharmacy practice curriculum. The curriculum of the college pharmacist and pharmacy assistance course also need to be reviewed to ensure adequate training is provided.

### ● **Postgraduate training and education**

In line with the changing the pharmacy undergraduate course, efforts need to be made to re-educate pharmacists who are already practicing. As well as learning about the GPP and pharmaceutical care, there needs to be some form of re-accreditation program for continuing education to ensure that pharmacists are regularly updating their knowledge base to ensure they can practice competently. Education programs need to be just like essential medicines, in that they are accessible, affordable, of good quality and which meet the needs of the population. Pharmacists need to be updated with the latest changes in therapy, medications and other pharmacy practice issues that relate to their patient care.

### ● **Standardization of Practice**

The Ministry of Health and pharmaceutical association have concerns about the difficulties of implementing GPP across all types of pharmacies, from standard drug stores, hospitals to drug outlets. Despite the odds, it is a necessity to expect pharmacists – at every level of training – to practice at least at a minimum set standard. For example, patient details must be recorded on any transaction of registered prescription medications both in pharmacy record books and on the medication itself. At the moment, there are varying degrees of documentation from

pharmacy to pharmacy; some do not even make any records at all. Pharmacists also often supply prescription medicines indiscriminately, with or without a doctor's written authorization.

According to the Pharmacy Law, a university level pharmacist must be present to supervise and manage a store. Often these pharmacists register to open a pharmacy but hire college pharmacists to run the store. Currently there are not punitive consequences for this breach of law.

The Pharmacy Law needs to be enforced and punitive action taken for noncompliance. Pharmacists need to be accountable for their actions. Professional Standards and Codes of Conduct need to be established to compliment the new GPP initiative, to ensure streamline practice of acceptable standards from all pharmacists.

### ● **Health without wealth**

Vietnam is still a poor country with medical and pharmaceutical costs considered expensive compared to household incomes, and not considered a priority compared food or housing. Hopefully the new association with the WTO will bring more wealth into the country. However, how much of this money will be invested into improving the health sector or somehow distributed evenly among the population is unknown. At the moment, it is evident that the city-folk are more well off than those in rural areas, who have limited access to medical services. Some are so poor they struggle to earn enough to feed themselves, let alone their families.

The government also needs to address the issue of poverty, particularly in remote regions. Without money people cannot afford to look after their health; without their health, they cannot be productive citizens and earn wealth for themselves or for their country.

### ● **Pharmacy sector regulation**

Recent WTO agreements will bring both opportunities for growth as well as challenges. A significant amount new medicines will enter the market which will demand not only pharmacists to keep up with current drug information and therapies, but the need to regulate the pharmaceutical market to ensure price control of essential medicines and rationale use of medications.

### **Future:**

It was intended that the GPP draft be finalized by the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007. The draft, as we saw it in December, was not consistent with international guidelines and required extensive review before finalization. The Western Pacific Pharmaceutical Forum has taken it on board to review the document for improvements.

As a new member of the WTO, Vietnam is obviously moving into the new era of liberalized trade including pharmaceuticals. It will be extremely important for the government to be able to make strategic viable steps to ensure access to essential medicines is stable and sustainable, to ensure impartial healthcare for all citizens.

There is need for strong technical assistance in improving the standards of pharmacy practice. This can be achieved through development of a national drug policy that ensures the rational use of medicines and patient-centred care.

Both FIP and WPPF will consider funding applications over the next three to four years, as Vietnam progresses with its GPP initiative. Although, there is still an urgent need for technical assistance in how to implement the project successfully. This is where international networking between other pharmaceutical associations, authorities and university will benefit in the development of pharmacy practice.

The Vietnamese government and pharmaceutical association should to be commended on their commitment to improving the country's pharmacy standards. They have taken a huge step in a positive direction for striving for international standards. There needs to be strong emphasis on education and training across board; especially in the undergraduate course if GPP is to be sustainable in the long run. As long as Vietnam remains dedicated to the cause and with continued international input and support, the country will be able to achieve GPP standards in the future.

## Other Workshop Activities

### Cultural Visits:

#### ● Museum of Ethnology

Currently there is a exhibition on the *Doi Moi* (Reform) period of Vietnam. Displays showed of life in the subsidiary era, when citizens had to queue up in order to buy food and clothes with coupons, the cramped conditions of housing, and personal accounts of the hardships of everyday living during that time.



It was interesting to see the creativity that flourished during that time, as people had improvise using their limited resources to makes clothes, dolls for the children to play with to household appliances. It was this creativity, this self-sufficiency and thirst for liberalization which is said to driven the *Doi Moi* period and the reason why Vietnam took advantage to the free market so quickly to start businesses ventures and enter trade.



- **Water Puppets**



- **Van Mieu** – Vietnam's first university.

The university has a beautiful garden courtyard and temple-like architecture. Students often come here before the exams for good luck and also post-exam results to show their gratitude for their good fortune.

## Gourmet Adventure:

### • Steam boat lunch:

After our first meeting, the VPA hosted a banquet seafood steamboat lunch at a restaurant on the lower ground of their office building. It was a chance to try the fresh Vietnamese cuisine and become acquainted with the association members.



### • Executive Lunch:

Traphaco executives joined the GPP delegation for a traditional gourmet lunch. The menu consisting of fried sweet potato, fresh shrimp, stir-fried pumpkin roots, fried Asian donut, steamed fish, and 'hot and sour' soup.

