

Press Release

EU Health Commissioner: wholesalers play a crucial role in ensuring continuous, efficient and timely supply of medicines

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Noordwijk, the Netherlands – The 57th Annual General Meeting and Conference of European healthcare distributors has gotten underway this morning in the Dutch coastal town of Noordwijk.

EU Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis in his opening video message to a packed room of healthcare distributors, figure heads from the pharma industry and healthcare professionals, stated that “European citizens need access to safe, innovative, and affordable medicine that is sold at socially acceptable prices as well as access to good quality healthcare.”

The EU’s top health official highlighted how healthcare distributors and wholesalers “play a crucial role to ensure a continuous, efficient and timely supply of medicines and medical devices to pharmacists and other healthcare institutions. This truly allows you,” he said, “to contribute to improving the quality of patients’ care and also to act on pricing.”

While mentioning the “need to strike a balance between solidarity-based health systems and industries interested to make profit for their drugs,” he also underlined his belief “that better pricing mechanisms for pharmaceuticals, more transparency, open negotiations and increased cooperation not only allow better access to quality healthcare for [the] European Union and [its] citizens, but also would create more trust to work with the industry and supply chain.”

Supply chain cooperation and partnership are among the key themes of this years’ conference, which is focused on a vision for the future of healthcare distribution. GIRP’s members are keen to engage with authorities and industry to develop a clear and workable vision for all stakeholders in the medicines supply chain and healthcare sector.

“Healthcare distributors can play a key role in achieving results”, said René Jenny, GIRP President, in response to the Commissioner’s welcoming words. “GIRP members,” he went on, “stand ready to work with authorities, industry, healthcare professionals and all parties in the supply chain to achieve better access to healthcare products at affordable prices”. However, they are also positioned to deliver healthcare savings through better patient outcomes achieved, for instance, through services provided to patients via the pharmacy. In particular, he stressed that “at least part of the savings, generated from patient-centered services and solutions, needs to be invested into incentives for further services development or used for the direct purchase of services from providers such as GIRP members, which achieve better patient outcomes through their broad range of pharmacy services.” The direct purchase of patient services for better patient outcomes is a discussion that needs to take place between the suppliers and healthcare budget mandarins. Payers also need to balance their drive for the lowest price with room for investment in alternative cost-saving schemes.

Turning to the fight against falsified medicines, the Commissioner outlined how it is a “concern for all of us”. The Delegated Regulation on safety features, he reminded, “forms an important set of rules that will guide you, as wholesalers, to ensure that the supply chain adheres to the highest level of quality and safety across Europe.” Building on that statement, he underlined that “This is why I encourage you to timely implement those requirements falling under your responsibility – in particular, by ensuring that fake medicines entering in the supply chain are intercepted before they reach pharmacies or hospitals and later, patients.”

Commenting on this Monika Derecque-Pois, Director General of GIRP, echoed the words of the Commissioner. Wholesalers have clearly defined responsibilities arising from the legislation and are already gearing up to ensure compliance. She noted, however, that they also have a role to play in ensuring that national medicines verification systems are set-up and managed with the full and direct involvement of wholesalers. Systems developed and managed without wholesaler and pharmacy involvement are highly unlikely to be consistent with the requirements of the legislation. René Jenny, GIRP President encouraged “all GIRP national member associations to take a proactive role in driving the establishment of the national medicines verification organization with all supply chain stakeholders.”

In closing his intervention, the Commissioner stressed his “firm belief in the added value of working together in partnership and in full transparency across the European Union to the benefit of EU citizens, creating trust of citizens, and increasing the efficiency of our healthcare systems. You, the wholesalers, have a critical role in the distribution chain and therefore, I invite you to work constructively with us as a stakeholder.”

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European Healthcare Distribution Association (GIRP)

GIRP, the European Healthcare Distribution Association, is the umbrella organisation for pharmaceutical full-line wholesalers and distributors of healthcare products and services in Europe. It represents the national associations of over 750 pharmaceutical wholesalers serving 33 European countries, as well as major international and pan-European healthcare distribution companies. GIRP members employ over 140,000 people and distribute around 15 billion packs of medicines as well as a wide range of healthcare products per year. As the vital link in healthcare, they are committed to developing and providing innovative and efficient healthcare products and services to improve health and wellbeing of patients across Europe.