



23.03.2020: Medicines for the people, not for profit!

Far from promoting innovation, private research and the pharmaceutical industry pursue profit objectives rather than public health objectives. They have been withdrawing from essential medicines research, the profitability of which they consider uncertain: the World Health Organization (WHO) deplors budget cuts in the search for drugs for antimicrobial resistant bacteria that cause tens of thousands of deaths every year.

Past experience shows us that that pharmaceutical companies are only interested in making profit. Novartis's patented medicine for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy (Zolgensma) is known as "the most expensive drug in the world". Gilead's patented medicine for the treatment of hepatitis C (name of drug since you included the earlier one) sold at 400 times the production cost. The procedures for authorizing the marketing of medicines in Europe are designed to favour commercial interests at the expense of serious assessments of efficacy and safety. Research shows that only 10% of new medicines authorized for marketing in Europe have real advantages beyond medicines that are already available.

In fact, citizens ultimately pay for their medicines twice: once by funding public research in hospital and university research centres and a second time when they buy the medicines from laboratories that have acquired patents based on the results of public research.

The Association ESE, together with the *European Network against Privatization and Commercialization of Health and Social Protection* and the *People's Health Movement Europe (PHM)* stress that effective and safe medicines, including the eventual vaccine against the new coronavirus and treatment for the disease it causes, COVID-19, must be made available free of charge to all citizens, without personal expenses, and that fair prices must be paid by national health systems.

To this end, the Association ESE, and the European Network and PHM Europe call on the European institutions and Member States, as well as the other European countries, to amend the rules governing the European Medicines Agency and the competent agencies in Member States and not member states along the following lines:

- a) Data supporting applications for approval of medicinal products must be made public and cannot be kept confidential. The entire process leading up to the marketing decision must be available for independent review. Trade secrecy cannot be invoked to justify confidentiality when public health is at stake.
- b) The clinical trials requested by the European Medicines Agency for the evaluation of efficacy and safety must demonstrate superiority rather than non-inferiority, as is the rule today. This avoids the marketing of products that do not represent genuine innovations compared to those already available, but which may increase expenditure on medicines and the profits of pharmaceutical companies.
- c) Studies submitted in support of the application for approval are currently promoted by industry, which encourages conflicts of interest. We need studies conducted by independent, not-for-profit, publicly funded agencies, unrelated to the companies applying for approval.

Furthermore, we call on the EU Member States to adopt an aggressive strategy for negotiating the prices of new medicines. If companies insist on setting unduly high prices patent rights must be revoked. We also demand the necessary resources for public research. A coordinated, socialised research and production area for medicines must be created.

On 7 April, World Health Day, decentralised actions are being organised throughout Europe. For the fifth consecutive year, the European Network and PHM calls on citizens, health workers, associations, etc. to come together on the Day of Action against the Commercialization of Health.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic we have cancelled all gatherings and actions with physical contact.

We therefore call on every citizen to demonstrate their support by "spreading solidarity, not the virus".

How? With a "white sheet" action on April 7:

- 1. Hang a white sheet with a slogan in a visible place or make a poster at home**
- 2. Take a picture of yourself with your messages**
- 3. Post it on social media**
 - **add the hashtag #health4all**
 - **address it to your political leaders**

The Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women (ESE), www.esem.org.mk, - P. +389 78 260 819, dantik@esem.org.mk

The European Network against the Privatization and Commercialization of Health and Social Protection - <http://europe-health-network.net/> - P. +32499 42 44 48, europeanhealthnetwork@gmail.com

People's Health Movement Europe - <https://phmovement.org/> - ana@phmovement.org