

ADDRESSING MEDICINES SHORTAGES

Medicines shortages is a perennial problem of the European health systems, and especially of the Greek one, which was intensified by the COVID pandemic. One of the main pillars of the European Pharmaceutical Strategy is tackling medicines shortages. More specifically, the EU, through the proposed revision of the European Pharmaceutical Legislation, tries to address the deficiencies through the following measures:

1 Obligation of MAHs to ensure adequate and continuous supplies to wholesalers and pharmacists

2 Member States will create a list of critical medicines based on the EU methodology, which in turn will approve and update an European list of critical medicines

THE SITUATION IN GREECE

The 44 manufacturing plants in Greece ensure the production of generally inexpensive medicines, provided that raw materials are available.

Shortages are mainly observed in on-patent medicines, which due to very low prices become the target of parallel exports. More specifically, the long-term decreases in the average price of on-patent medicines in Greece and the ban on price increases, result in the average price of a on-patent medicine in Greece being 1/2 of the European average and 1/5 of the price in Germany/Austria.

In addition, there is lack of monitoring the entire distribution chain as well as the stocks of the pharmaceuti-

cal warehouses, with the ban on exports being the only immediate solution. In order to ensure the sufficiency of medicines, EOF issues ban of exports of a specific duration. The ban on exports is a measure that is applied temporarily and selectively with the aim of ensuring patients access to medicines that are exported to other countries and therefore become elusive or difficult to find for the Greek patient.

The practice of banning exports is also followed by Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania, countries with very low prices as well. At the end of 2022, an export ban was issued for 180 medicines, indefinitely.

RECENTLY, EOF ANNOUNCED AS MEASURES TO LIMIT MEDICINES SHORTAGES AND ENSURE ADEQUATE SUPPLY THE:



ELECTRONIC PRESCRIPTION OF MEDICINES IN SHORTAGE



ESTABLISHMENT OF A PLATFORM FOR RECORDING SALES BETWEEN PHARMACIES (BUT NOT BETWEEN GROUPS) AND



SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN MEDICINES STOCKS

SFEE PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS SHORTAGE OF MEDICINES

The proposals that SFEE has submitted to the national and European authorities have as their main pillar the transparency and control of the circulation of the medicines. More specifically, since May 2016, all pharmaceutical companies operating in Greece send on a daily basis to the National Medicines Organization their sales data by code (Stock Keeping Unit/SKU) and by VAT number. Unfortunately, although it is a valuable tool for monitoring the market in real-time, it has been inactive, and in recent years EOF has not published the above data.

▶ AT NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Use of pharmaceutical companies' sales data by the competent authorities as a monitoring tool
- Systematic and continuous control throughout medicines chain and recording of medicines stocks in pharmacies
- Before lifting the ban on exports, it is crucial to ensure that there is sufficient supply of medicines for domestic use.

▶ AT EUROPEAN LEVEL:

- Create a common definition of shortages and a common interoperable monitoring platform linked to the European Medicines Verification System
- In order to gain insight into the rising demand, the ECDC epidemiological data should be used

The causes of shortages differ from country to country, which is why the problem of shortages must be tackled both at the national and European level.

Recognizing the peculiarity that characterizes medicines shortages in our country, the State must utilize the appropriate mechanisms in order to comprehensively deal with the issue of the shortages recorded over time.

Any increase in medicines stocks will not reduce shortages in our country and will result in a dramatic increase in costs to the pharmaceutical industry, unless transparency and monitoring of the distribution chain is ensured.

SFEE AND ITS MEMBER COMPANIES ARE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING TO SUPPORT THE STATE IN ORDER TO ENSURE PATIENTS' UNHINDERED ACCESS TO THEIR MEDICINES.