
WORKSHOP: EFFECTIVE RX-TO-OTC SWITCHING

Chairman's introduction

Dr Jerome A Reinstein, Director General, World Self-Medication Industry (WSMI)

Freeing appropriate medicines for sale without prescription is an important way of further developing self-responsibility in health care. It is now more and more accepted that people have an obligation and a right to take an active part in their own healthcare, and switching medicines to OTC status is one way of helping develop this.

It has been estimated that large proportions of doctor visits in Europe are for conditions that can be easily recognised and treated by the patient himself or herself. One way of helping people to take greater charge of common health problems is by giving them more choice in the medicines they are able to purchase without a prescription. It is obvious that a desirable 'side effect' of this is increased self-reliance.

The purpose of this workshop is to learn from each other about the successes and also to learn from some of the switches that have not been universally successful around the world. We hope this will lead to more harmonisation of classification with the experience in one

country being taken into account when another country is considering a switch.

We have asked our colleagues in member associations from around the world – USA, Mexico Japan and Australia – as well as four of our colleagues from Europe – France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom – to speak. We will also have a European view of the basis for switching as well as an American view on benefit / risk decision-making for switching before a general discussion at the end of the Workshop.

I would like now to hand over to my co-chairman for this Workshop, Professor Alfred Hildebrandt, Director of the German Institute for Medicines and Medical Devices here in Berlin. Professor Hildebrandt is also currently Chairman of the Heads of Agencies of the European Union. He is well known in European and also in international circles for his work both in Germany and at the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA), and we are particularly pleased that he has accepted to co-chair this workshop.

