

THE FIRST SELF-MEDICATION UNIVERSITIES HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS ARE ON THE MOVE!

The first Self-Medication Universities were held yesterday in Paris. They were organised by Pharmaceutiques, in partnership with Afipa.

Nearly 130 people attended the event. The programme was dense: it included putting self-medication in France into perspective with other European countries, discussing the pharmaceutical healthcare process, debating on how to promote self-medication... Six round tables created focus points during the day.

The 22 conference speakers (pharmacists, general practitioners, members of Parliament, patient associations, laboratories...) unanimously stated that France is lagging behind other countries such as Great Britain, Switzerland or Canada, in spite of 80% of the French people indicating that they regularly self-medicate.

UNANIMOUSLY RECOGNISED EFFICIENCY

None of the speakers denied self-medication efficiency. On the contrary. « *Self-medication based on medicines without any real medical benefit was a reality 20 years ago. Today, we are able to recommend the same molecules as those used by general practitioners* » declared Gilles Bonnefond, President of USPO (the pharmacist trade union).

Numerous benefits were mentioned: Dr Luc Duquesnel, President of CSMF, considers that self-medication corresponds to a prevention logic.

For Dr Laurent Grange, President of AFLAR (French Association against Rheumatism), self-medication saves time in dealing with a pathology because it is mainly used early on, when the symptoms appear.

In addition, it could avoid certain useless medical treatments and reduce congestion in waiting rooms, according to Dr Martial Olivier-Koehret, General Practitioner in Luxeuil (70, France), President of the Coordinated Healthcare Association.

LONG-STANDING OBSTACLES

In France, self-medication is not recognised by the public authorities. « *Nevertheless, it should be an integral part of the healthcare system* » declared Jurate Svarcaite, Director General of AESGP (Association of the European Self-Medication Industry).

Numerous media smear campaigns regarding medicinal products have made it difficult to develop a positive image of self-medication. Indeed, general practitioners sometimes lack coherence.

Delphine Bagarry, Member of Parliament, representative of the Alpes de Haute Provence area and Member of the Social Affairs Committee, explained: « *We cannot, on the one hand, encourage parents not to rush to the doctor's every time their baby has a fever and suggest they give him paracetamol instead and, on the other hand, ask them not to self-medicate.* »

HOW CAN WE PROMOTE SELF-MEDICATION?

To the question « How can we make self-medication a reference? », Luc Besançon, former Managing Director of the International Pharmaceutical Federation – FIP – answered: « *We must make people consider self-medication as a solution. We don't provide a product, we provide a solution!* »

Better communication for the general public via, for example, new technologies (websites, connected devices, social media ...) should be explored, according to Bas Vorsteveld, President of GSK Consumer Healthcare France and FAMAG (French-speaking Africa & Maghreb). Such tools would be the proper place for the Shared Medical File (dossier médical partagé, DMP) and the Pharmaceutical File (dossier pharmaceutique, DP).

THE PHARMACIST'S ROLE IS ESSENTIAL

Certain de-reimbursed molecules can become self-medication medicines. However, these medicines are regularly blamed for inefficiency. Agnès Firmin Le Bodo, Member of Parliament, representative of the Seine-Maritime area and Member of the Social Affairs Committee, clearly stated her opposition: « *It's up to the pharmacist to convince his patients. If a cough syrup has helped for years that means it still helps*».

Stéphane Pichon, Member of the National Pharmacists' Association and President of the Medical Association of the PACA Corse region, added that self-medication does not only cover free-access, over-the-counter products, it also includes products placed behind the counter which are delivered by the pharmacist, whose advice is therefore essential.

FULL SUPPORT FOR AN INTER-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-MEDICATION

In addition to the pharmacist's role, the development of self-medication can only occur on an inter-professional basis. The patient associations attending the event, as well as the healthcare professionals, agreed: « *The general practitioner, the nurse, the pharmacist, the physical therapist ...all healthcare professionals have a role to play.* »

In conclusion, Daphné Lecomte-Somaggio, Managing Director of Afipa, congratulated the audience for the numerous exchanges which took place during the day and underlined all attendees' willingness to work collectively on the topic of self-medication. However, she sadly noted that the authorities who had been invited to participate in the debates did not come. « *I suggest we start working all together to give self-medication the place it deserves in the patients' healthcare process. Let's meet again next year to measure our progress during our 2nd Self-Medication Universities* »

Afipa is the professional federation representing the companies which produce and commercialise healthcare products available over the counter in pharmacies (self-medication medicines, medical devices and food supplements).

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