



Vice President Günter Verheugen
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels (Belgium)

9th September 2008

Dear Commissioner

We are writing as representatives of patients, consumers and healthcare professionals in the UK to raise our concerns about the forthcoming European Commission legislative proposals on the provision of information to patients.

In particular, we are concerned about any legislative proposal that will provide pharmaceutical companies with greater flexibility to provide information directly to the public on prescription medicines.

Whilst our organisations fully support the drive for more and better information for patients about health, disease, treatments and medicines, we are very concerned that the proposals outlined in the DG Enterprise consultation in February 2008 may only serve to exacerbate the problems and issues that they have been designed to address.

Furthermore we are concerned that the proposal to allow pharmaceutical companies to provide 'non-promotional information' on prescription medicines is in effect introducing advertising by the back door. The proposals in the February 2008 consultation suggested that pharmaceutical companies would be permitted to 'push' information directly to consumers, as patients, through TV, radio, printed media and other channels. In the absence of a consensus on the distinction between information and advertising, we believe that these proposals will effectively undermine the ban on direct to consumer advertising.

Direct to consumer information could also lead to the same negative effects of direct to consumer advertising. For instance, increasing the profile of and demand for more profitable branded drugs to the detriment of others, when their merits relevant to one another are unproven, could unnecessarily push up healthcare budget expenditure and put the finite resources of national health systems under pressure.

All patients have the right to objective and high quality information about their health and medical treatment, however research has shown that many patients do not trust information provided by pharmaceutical companies. Pharmaceutical companies already have a number of ways in which to provide information to patients. For instance, via patient information leaflets found in medicines, disease awareness campaigns and advertising non-prescription medicines.

The European Commission should therefore use the existing legal framework to look at alternative policy actions such as enabling the EMEA to be a central and impartial source of information about medicines, other non pharmacological treatments and making statutory information equally available and accessible in all EU Member States. An EU-wide survey could also be conducted on patients' information needs around medicines from all sources, not just pharmaceutical companies. Only

armed with a real overview of the situation, and patients' needs across the EU, should proposals then be tabled.

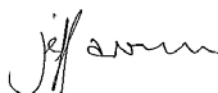
We therefore urge the Commission to reconsider its proposals from February 2008 before the legislative package on pharmaceuticals is tabled in October.

For more information contact Pete Moorey at pete.moorey@which.co.uk or on 020 7770 7612.

Yours sincerely



Dr Hamish Meldrum
Chair of BMA Council



Dr Jeff Aronson
President of the British Pharmacological Society



Simon O'Neill
Director of Care, Information and Advocacy, Diabetes UK



Julie Bentley
Chief Executive, Family Planning Association



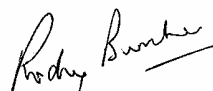
Paul Farmer
Chief Executive, Mind



Angela Coulter
Chief Executive, Picker Institute Europe



Dr Peter Carter OBE
Chief Executive and General Secretary, Royal College of Nursing



Dr Rodney Burnham
Registrar, Royal College of Physicians



Helen McCallum
Director of Policy and Communications, Which?