

Call for Rational Use of Medicines

Speakers from several civil society organizations have strongly urged WHO member governments to back the resolution on Rational Use of Medicines (RUM) being introduced at the 60th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

At a round table meeting organized on the sidelines of the WHA they also called for proper implementation of the resolution at the national level through the formation of multi-disciplinary bodies to ensure co-ordination and monitoring of the use of medicines.

The resolution EB120.R12 calls for holistic approach, which would give WHO a new mandate to promote the rational use of medicines through an integrated health systems/medicines policy. Among other things it calls upon member states to invest sufficiently in human resources to strengthen institutional capacity to ensure appropriate use of medicines in both public and private sectors.

Dr Kathleen Holloway of the WHO said that the specific shape and structure of the national bodies would vary according to the context and does not have to mean the setting up of yet another vertical health program that so often in the past has proved ineffective.

In her presentation on the subject Teresa Alves of Health Action International provided evidence of how pharmaceutical companies were pushing irrational use of medicine through the misleading advertisements. Eva Ombaka of the World Council of Churches said that the costs of healthcare delivery can be brought down substantially through the rational use of medicines.

Dr Batool Jaffer, from the Ministry of Health, Oman explained how the use of medicine in Oman had been rationalized and streamlined through concerted efforts. She said political will was one of the most important requirements to take on the might of large drug companies that were often interested in selling their products irrespective of the efficacy or cost to consumers.

‘Rational use of medicines is a first step towards containing the growing problem of antibiotic resistance’ said Dr Otto Cars of ReAct, a global coalition working to ensure access to effective treatment to bacterial infection. Outlining the dangers of indiscriminate use or even abuse of antibiotics, Dr Cars said that without urgent action the world could run out of effective antibiotics in a very short period of time.

While supporting the resolution being introduced at the 60th WHA ReAct however also believes that the WHO should not subsume the issue of antimicrobial resistance under rational use of medicines and instead address it as a wider and more multi-faceted problem.

