



THE NETWORK'S NEWS LETTER

(a quarterly publication)

ASSOCIATION FOR RATIONAL USE
OF MEDICATION IN PAKISTAN

(a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital)

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P.O. Regn. No. 26
ISSN 1022 - 257X

June 1994, Vol. 3, No. 2

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Drug Research Fund

Medical Research in Pakistan has always taken a back seat and most often the excuse given is that there are financial constraints in promoting research. In this situation, it is amazing that the Ministry of Health is sitting on millions of rupees collected over the last 16 years from the Pharmaceutical industry in the name of drug research but not a rupee has been spent on research.

It was in July 1978 that the Federal Government created a Central Research Fund to be maintained by the Ministry of Health. The fund consists of 1% of the gross profit of the pharmaceutical industry. By now, this fund should be in the range of hundreds of millions of rupees. The fund was to be utilized for clinical trials and research on drugs.

The Federal Government was also supposed to constitute a committee of experts to advise on the utilization of this research fund. The committee consisting of D.G. Health, Executive Director NIH, Chairman of PMRC, Chairman of PCSIR, Chairman of Pharmacy Department, Dean of Faculty of Pharmacy, Professor of Pharmacology, Representative of Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, and Drug Controller. In the last 16 years, although, millions of rupees were collected under this head not a single grant has been given from the fund for conducting research and neither the Government ever asked for applications for such grants. As a matter of fact, the Committee could not even meet! The first meeting, after a lapse of 16 years, was held a few days back. It is most unfortunate that in spite of the fact that the Ministry of Health has a large sum of money reserved specifically for research, it has failed in its duty to encourage medical research.

It is suggested that the Ministry of Health should utilize this large amount to improve pharmaceutical research and should involve those institutions,

organizations and individuals who are working in this field. In this regard the Ministry should get in touch with College of Physicians & Surgeons, Pakistan which has recently started a discipline of Clinical Pharmacology and is now establishing a National Adverse Drugs Reaction (ADR) Monitoring Centre. The Network for the Rational Use of Medication also has been providing objective information about drugs to doctors and the general public and can make use of funding from the Ministry to improve its services. Besides that the Ministry should get in touch with those individuals who are interested in this field and provide necessary facilities in the field of drug research and related areas.

Essential Drug List

Recently, the MoH convened a meeting of experts from all medical disciplines to formulate a new List of Essential Drugs. The Committee, after thorough discussions, recommended 471 drugs to be included in the National Essential Drugs List. This time the committee, along with the medical specialists representing their respective professional groups, also included health administrators from all the four provinces and AJK governments, Armed Forces, and private sector. A relatively liberal list, can cater to the needs of not only the teaching hospitals but also that of the district hospitals, rural health centers and basic health units. This is a welcome step. But an important point to remember is that this list needs to be implemented in all the Government Health Facilities. Otherwise, like previous lists, it will also meet the same fate and would gradually become dead and forgotten.

The supply of these drugs should be assured in all the facilities. The list should be widely circulated and publicized and doctors should be encouraged to prescribe these drugs not only in the Government Hospitals but also in their private practices. Doctors should not prescribe the drugs from outside the list without full justification.

The next logical step would be to limit the number of non-essential drugs registered with the MoH

Corrigendum:

The following typographic mistakes appeared in our March '94 issue. On page 5, line 24, please read "ingested" instead of "indigested". On page 10 under "Thiazides", line 8, please read "Cerebrovascular" instead of "Cardiovascular", On page 11, para 3, line 16, please read "Periactin BC" instead of "Beriactin BC".

We regret the oversight.

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