
MEDIA RELEASE

Pharmacists ready to meet evolving crises with concerted action

Accra, Ghana – At the 10th CPA Conference in Accra held from 5 – 8 August 2009, the Commonwealth Pharmacists Association (CPA) identified ways in which pharmacists may participate in meeting the challenges of reducing health risks during times of crisis.

The modern world is challenged by many risks, both natural and man-made, that threaten the health of many and welfare of many people, with children being particularly exposed, especially in developing countries. Many of these threats can be plausibly predicted. “In these cases, appropriate steps can frequently be taken to anticipate, prevent or manage the health risk,” said Ivan Kotzé, President of the CPA. “Pharmacists are active in many critical areas that contribute to alleviation of suffering and promotion of health, welfare and safety.”

The CPA conference, which had as its theme “Managing Threats and Crises: The vital role of pharmacy in an unstable world”, culminated in the adoption of the Accra Communiqué, which outlines the way in which pharmacists may perceive and assess the risks and contribute to their management or reduction.

Kotzé concluded, “Pharmacists of the CPA are willing and able to take leadership roles in protecting the public by reducing risk and improving health throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.”

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Note to editors:

The Commonwealth Pharmacists Association (CPA) is a non-government organisation representing professional pharmaceutical societies from over 40 Commonwealth countries. Over 1200 pharmacists from throughout the Commonwealth are personal members of CPA.

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Conference theme: *Managing Threats and Crises: The vital role of pharmacy in an unstable world*

- Natural and man-made threats and crises and failures of systems are increasingly common features of the modern world.¹ Many of them and the dangers they pose have radical and damaging effects on the health and welfare of often large populations, with children particularly exposed, especially in developing countries.
- Deficiencies and inequalities in human rights and in the provision of basic resources, services and opportunities² contribute significantly to global disease and premature death.

The CPA recognises the burden of suffering and the multiple deprivations of millions of the world's population, and the threats to which they, and some groups in particular,³ are vulnerable. Pharmacists, distributed widely throughout the continents, and in some of the remotest places, are especially well-placed to perceive and assess the risks and to contribute to their management or reduction.

Pharmacists of the Commonwealth call upon their colleague professionals throughout the world:

1. To be alert to the specific current and potential threats to the health, welfare and safety of their patients and communities; to become advocates for positive change; to collaborate with others, locally, nationally and internationally in the alleviation of suffering and the anticipation and prevention of crises.
2. To take part in collaborative planning for the reduction of risk and for the management of disasters and crises, especially those that are current and continuous, and those which can be plausibly predicted.^{4,5}
3. To be compassionate professionals, far beyond the basic roles of drug retailers and dispensers,⁶ actively committed to understanding their patients and local communities and the multiple risks and needs which affect their health, happiness, welfare and safety.
4. To work actively with patients and communities to improve health-related behaviour and health in general, through effective one-to-one relationships, outreach activities, education, public health initiatives, campaigns, community development, advocacy and other means.

¹ TB, HIV/AIDS, malaria, pandemic viral infections, cancer, heart disease; lifestyle diseases (e.g. diabetes, hypertension, obesity); tobacco use; extreme weather events, natural disasters; control of counterfeit and illegal drug trafficking; unregulated use of medicines. Globalisation poses challenges but also offers opportunities.

² Shortages of food, water, shelter; poor sanitation; lack of education; lack of access to healthcare services and medicines; unemployment. Pharmacists in the Commonwealth reaffirm their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

³ Pregnant women, children, the elderly.

⁴ Diseases: malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB, diabetes, obesity; behaviour: safe sex, compliant medication use, rational use of drugs (especially antibiotics), disease vector control; issues: counterfeit and sub-standard medicines, medication error, infant and maternal mortality, drug resistance; events: flooding, wild fires, earthquakes, tsunamis.

⁵ E.g.: stockpiling of appropriate medicines, vaccines, surgical and other supplies; drills and training in disaster response; preparation of refuges and safe-havens.

⁶ While noting that pharmacists bear primary responsibility for meeting the medicine-related needs of populations.

5. In recognition of the particular threats to the welfare and survival of children, and of global commitments to this cause, to work actively to ensure progressive realisation of the full rights of children, including the right of access to healthcare and to appropriate, high quality essential medicines.^{7,8}

These vivid and high-priority opportunities and challenges are being met only partly and incompletely, if at all, in most parts of the world.

Pharmacists, who are closely in touch with the majority of all patients and their communities, are in a unique position to change things for the better. Pharmacists in industry bear key responsibility for providing safe, efficacious and affordable, quality medicines. In their daily relationships and activities, and in developing their vision of a better world, all pharmacists should take leadership in many aspects of reducing risk and improving health throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

This communiqué had the unanimous support of the large international audience present at the meeting.

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⁷ Children need access to age-appropriate dosage forms of medicines.

⁸ Health systems are encouraged to remove financial barriers limiting access to healthcare and medicines, for all children.