

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC**



REPORT

**WORKSHOP ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN MANAGEMENT
AND USE OF PHARMACEUTICALS, BIOLOGICALS AND
HERBAL MEDICINES FOR PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES**

**Nadi, Fiji
25-28 October 1999**

**Manila, Philippines
June 2000**

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REPORT

WORKSHOP ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN MANAGEMENT AND USE OF PHARMACEUTICALS, BIOLOGICALS AND HERBAL MEDICINES FOR PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Convened by:

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC
Nadi, Fiji
25-28 October 1999**

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NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants of the workshop and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the World Health Organization.

This report has been prepared by the Regional Office for the Western Pacific of the World Health Organization for governments of Member States in the Region and for the participants in the Workshop on Information Exchange in Management and Use of Pharmaceuticals, Biologicals and Herbal Medicines for Pacific Island Countries, which was held in Nadi Fiji from 25 to 28 October 1999.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.1 Objectives.....	2
1.2 Participants.....	2
1.3 Organization	3
1.4 Opening Ceremony.....	3
2. PROCEEDINGS	3
2.1 Presentation	3
2.2 Discussions.....	3
3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	6
3.1 Conclusions	6
3.2 Recommendations	7
4. <u>ANNEXES:</u>	
ANNEX 1 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS, CONSULTANTS, TEMPORARY ADVISERS, REPRESENTATIVES/OBSERVERS, AND SECRETARIAT.....	11
ANNEX 2 - PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES.....	19
ANNEX 3 - PLAN OF ACTION	23
ANNEX 4 - PALAU ACTION STATEMENT ON PHARMACEUTICALS.....	35
ANNEX 5 - PROPOSED CRITERIA AND CODE FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE CLOSED ELECTRONIC INFORMATION NETWORK.....	37
ANNEX 6 - SUMMARY OF SELECTED PHARMACEUTICAL-RELATED INFORMATION IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES.....	39

Key words

Information Exchange/Pharmaceuticals/Biological Products/Medicine, Herbal/Fiji
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SUMMARY

The Workshop on Information Exchange in Management and Use of Pharmaceuticals, Biologicals and Herbal Medicines in Pacific Island Countries was held in Nadi, Fiji, from 25 to 28 October 1999. The main objective of the workshop was to improve the availability, quality and use of pharmaceuticals, biologicals and herbal medicines in the Pacific island countries through strengthening and promoting a network for information exchange. This workshop reviewed past activities and to prepare plans for future collaboration. It aimed at strengthening and promoting information exchange as a cost effective tool to improve supply management, quality assurance and rational use of pharmaceuticals, biologicals and herbal medicines in Pacific island countries. The outcome of the workshop was to be presented to the governments concerned for endorsement.

The following recommendations were made:

- (1) The quality control testing of selected pharmaceuticals should be continued and expanded with support documentation, databases and information exchange within the region.
- (2) Drug procurement based on collaborative purchasing arrangements should also be expanded, and the concept of collaborative purchasing be promoted to improve supply management practices among Pacific island countries.
- (3) Other supply management tools like computer systems, electronic information network for information exchange as well as guidelines related to procurement should be introduced, and enhanced.
- (4) The use of biologicals and herbal medicines should be monitored more closely to improve the existing situations.
- (5) The closed electronic network for information exchange among Pacific island countries should be given priority in its implementation as a tool in improving the management and use of pharmaceuticals, biologicals and herbal medicines.
- (6) Effective measures to promote rational drug use should be pursued in the region through various possible means.

A detailed plan of action for information exchange and other collaborative activities related to drug quality assurance and procurement, relevant issues on biologicals and herbal medicines, and as well as rational drug use were also recorded.

1. INTRODUCTION

The workshop followed the endorsement of three major Ministers of Health of the Pacific islands meetings during the last six years, to improve the supply and use of pharmaceuticals in the Pacific. It involved the "Yanuca Island Meeting" held in 1994, which laid directions for collaborative activities on procurement of pharmaceuticals, rational use of drugs and the essential drugs concept as main topics for continued cooperation. The Yanuca Island Meeting was followed by a similar ministerial meeting held in the Cook Islands in 1997, which identified among others information exchange as a crucial area for collaboration as stated in the Rarotonga Agreement 1997.

The present workshop, however, was a direct outcome of the Workshop on Drug Supply Management and Drug Quality Assurance held in Nadi in November 1997 which initiated a network of pharmacists in the Pacific, to exchange experiences and ideas related to pharmaceuticals. Quality testing on a selected number of drugs was also started. In March 1999, a third meeting of the Ministers of Health of the Pacific island countries was held in Palau. It resulted in the "Palau Action Statement" which reaffirmed the directions and activities started earlier. In particular it urged that an electronic information exchange network be operational.

An electronic network for information exchange had been piloted in some Pacific island countries. The network generated some interest and it proved to be a viable option for information exchange. The workshop discussed measures to formalize the use of such a network.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- (1) to discuss the use of the network for information exchange as a tool to improve all aspects of drug supply management, quality assurance, and rational drug use;
- (2) to review the situation with regard to information exchange for biologicals and define ways to improve the situation;
- (3) to review collaborative activities undertaken between 1998 and 1999 in the area of drug supply management, quality assurance, rational drug use and drug information exchange;
- (4) to review the results of testing of pharmaceuticals conducted under the Quality Assurance Scheme for Pacific island countries and plan future actions to improve the quality of pharmaceuticals;
- (5) to share information on the use of herbal medicines and discuss appropriate measures regarding regulation of herbal medicinal products; and
- (6) to prepare a plan for collaborative activities for Pacific island countries in the area of information exchange for pharmaceuticals, biologicals and herbal medicines for 2000 and 2001.

1.2 Participants

A total of 19 participants from Pacific island countries attended the meeting. There were three temporary advisers, two consultants, two observers and four members of the WHO Secretariat. A list of their details is attached (Annex 1).

1.3 Organization

Mr Abdul A Azam and Mrs Melenaite Mahe were elected as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson respectively. Mr Sandy Alfred and Mr Charles Wayne Rivers were elected rapporteurs. The participants were provided with adequate information, background and discussion papers related to the subjects to be discussed in the workshop.

1.4 Opening Ceremony

Dr Li Shichou, WHO Representative in the South Pacific, delivered the opening remarks on behalf of Dr Shigeru Omi, Regional Director for the Western Pacific Region. He emphasized the importance of information and experience-sharing between countries for the benefit of all in the area of pharmaceuticals and health. However, obstacles needed to be identified and resolved, actions planned and implemented collaboratively. Dr Luke Rokovada, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health, Fiji, gave his opening address and welcomed the participants, consultants, temporary advisers and members of the Secretariat.

2. PROCEEDINGS

2.1 Presentation

The programme for the workshop was divided into five main sessions on drug quality assurance, drug procurement, biologicals in the Pacific, herbal medicines and information exchange (Annex 2). There was also a session on Plan of Action. Each of the sessions was preceded by an overview followed by discussion. Some sessions involved selected country presentations and working group discussions. The workshop concluded with discussions on the Plan of Action, 2000-2003, and adoption of recommendations.

Presentations covering aspects of drug supply management, legislation, quality assurance and rational drug use were presented by all participants to provide some background information before the start of the meeting. This was followed by an overview of the collaborative activities carried out in 1998 and 1999. From the beginning of the sessions, collaborative activities related to pharmaceuticals, like quality control testing, were recognized as a useful exercise that needed to be continued.

A detailed plan of action was drawn up and endorsed by the workshop (Annex 3).

2.2 Discussions

2.2.1 Overview of collaborative activities on pharmaceuticals

The discussion traced the beginning of the meeting from the Yanuca Island Declaration (1995) through the Rarotonga Agreement (1997), to the Nadi workshop of 1997 and the Palau Action Statement (1999). Various activities to improve the quality and procurement of pharmaceuticals were highlighted including the support given by WHO to some Pacific island countries during the period.

Information exchange had been one of the consistent themes in many meetings. It was mentioned in the March 1999 Palau Action Statement that endorsed the operation of an electronic network for information exchange within the Pacific region.

A questionnaire to update selected pharmaceutical information of countries in the Pacific region was also undertaken. The outcome is presented in Annex 6.

2.2.2 Drug quality assurance

The main discussion under this topic was the interpretation of the testing of 66 drug samples on behalf of the Pacific island countries. This was conducted between 1998 and 1999 by the Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia.

The results were too general to permit any definitive conclusions and problems were detected in some of the samples. Similarities in results of samples were noticed although they were sourced from more than one country. Overall, it raised concerns about the quality of some pharmaceuticals tested.

The plenary discussion that followed endorsed the interpretation of the test results and made recommendations to continue with similar activities. Other supporting recommendations that could help to improve drug quality in the Pacific island countries were also proposed (see 3.2.1).

2.2.3 Drug procurement

Three small island states (SIS) – Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu – presented their experiences related to drug procurement. This was followed by a presentation on collaborating purchasing arrangement of 64 items in Fiji and the small island countries (SIS), based on a project commissioned by the Forum Secretariat. In summary, some of the outcomes of the arrangement were as follows:

- there were substantial cost savings to SIS for many of the items purchased collaboratively;
- good pricing was observed in contrast to international pricing;
- generally, prices were low compared to local wholesale prices in Fiji; and
- controlled quality assurance process were ‘in-built’ within the arrangement.

The substantial savings were due to be due to the reduction in ‘freight’ cost to the SIS, apart from factors like drug sources, packaging size and also the use of generic items. The arrangement allowed for greater capacity to negotiate for better pricing as a bigger group was represented. The purchasing arrangement involved about 25 percent of the population in the South Pacific region.

UNICEF gave a presentation on its experiences on collaborative activities based on the vaccine procurement that involved the Pacific Vaccine Independence Initiative (VII), its revolving fund and procedures. Advantages from the VII were also enumerated. Some of them were:

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