



Minister Dr A. Klink

Ministry of Health,
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Dear Dr. Klink,

The need for the Dutch Government to support the “Geneesmiddelenbulletin”

In the Netherlands today, prescribers and dispensers are subjected to an onslaught of promotional material from the pharmaceutical industry about medicines. This material is aimed at increasing sales, not at increasing public health. Most promotional material is for new, patented and expensive medicines that offer no real benefit beyond existing treatment options.

Prescribers and dispensers therefore need access to independent, evidence-based information on medicines to enable them to make informed rational treatment choices in the interest of public health. Without independent information, prescribers and dispensers can only rely on the pharmaceutical industry promotional materials. Evidence-based independent information is at the core of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Essential Medicines and Rational Use of Medicines concepts and both have been endorsed by the Dutch government in a number of World Health Assembly resolutions.

The Geneesmiddelenbulletin has been supplying independent drug information to prescribers since 1967. It is recognised internationally as a leading journal of independent information, and as such is a member of the International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB). Its work has contributed to Dutch public health, appropriate prescribing, and cost saving for the last 40 years.

The long-standing commitment of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) to the Geneesmiddelenbulletin has enabled the free distribution of this essential information tool to Dutch prescribers and dispensers. This cooperation is seen by the international community as a flagship model of independent information delivery and is in line with the model of free distribution championed globally by the WHO. However, the draft report ‘Optimal information on pharmacotherapy’ which outlines the oversight of the Geneesmiddelenbulletin by the Health Insurance Board (CVZ) and the new financial scheme which does not provide for production and distribution costs of the bulletin, raises serious concerns for Dutch Public Health.

It appears that the content of the draft report may be driven by commercial interests rather than a public health commitment and that the proposals will pose a threat to the independence, distribution and public health impact of this vital publication. Therefore, before making any changes to the funding and distribution of Geneesmiddelenbulletin, HAI would like to draw your attention to the following key points and suggestions:

- The definition of independent information needs to be revised in line with internationally recognised norms¹.
- The 58,000 readers of the Geneesmiddelenbulletin should be consulted for their opinion on the need for independent information, the quality of published materials, and the value of the Geneesmiddelenbulletin at present.
- All bodies and/or institutions working for the development and delivery of independent medicines information in the Netherlands, including patients, consumers and civil society, need to be consulted on the future of Geneesmiddelenbulletin.
- Appropriate, predictable and sustainable resources and independent financing mechanisms for the development and delivery of independent drug information need to be sought.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tim Reed', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tim Reed
Health Action International, Global

¹ ISDB