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INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED

IQWiG patient information gets good marks from the
World Health Organization

WHO team of independent experts report on the importance and quality of one of Europe's leading patient information websites

Cologne, 6 May 2010. "Relevant, objective and independent": this is how the WHO rates the health information produced by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). "Increasingly it has become clear that a publicly funded and scientifically independent body can and should play an important role in providing objective and non-biased information to patients," said Kees de Joncheere, Regional Advisor for Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals in the WHO Regional Office for Europe. "This information is also a resource for other countries worldwide - translation into further languages would provide real benefits." The WHO now links to IQWiG's information.

Reviewing evidence-based patient information: a first for WHO in Europe

Germany's Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) is an independent scientific body established under the 2004 national health reform legislation. In 2008, the Institute invited the WHO to evaluate the methods it uses for developing patient information, as well as the information's quality and accuracy.

The WHO review assembled an international panel of five experts who assessed the Institute's work against the highest international criteria for quality. The final report contains a series of recommendations on how IQWiG could develop this programme and strengthen its role as a leading producer of patient-centred and evidence-based health information.

According to Dr de Joncheere, "The methods used by IQWiG provide a valid, high-quality approach that minimizes the risk of bias. The process includes relevant stakeholders. The inclusion of information gained through interviews with patients and the review of qualitative evidence add a valuable perspective."

The WHO team commended the Institute and its governing bodies for "its impressive achievements and the dedication, high technical competence and commitment of the Institute management and staff".

Areas for improvement

Dr de Joncheere said that, "As a team we focussed on areas

of controversy or potential improvement." For example:

- The criteria for selection of topics need to be finalised and published;
- The internal documentation of methodologies and workflows needs to be expanded and published;
- Dissemination and outreach strategies need to be intensified, to promote the site both to health professionals as well as to patients;
- The Institute should undertake methodological work so it can assess the impact of its information, and how patients appreciate non-directive or directive information.

"During the course of our review, some of the recommendations were directly implemented, such as developing a system to provide feedback to stakeholders on the comments they send in the consultation phase," said Dr de Joncheere.

The Institute's Director, Professor Peter Sawicki, expressed IQWiG's gratitude to the WHO and the review team for conducting the review so thoroughly. "We welcomed this opportunity to put our methods and results to the most stringent international test. The WHO report has provided valuable guidance on improving our work and ensuring its sustainability. The Institute wants to implement as many of the recommendations as possible."

"Germany's lawmakers wanted IQWiG's work to strengthen the autonomy of patients. To do this, we have to move past the long tradition of telling patients what they should and should not do. This is a new kind of patient information," Professor Sawicki said. "It is vital that IQWiG continues its commitment to the best possible independent, evidence-based patient information. The community is flooded with biased information. Now more than ever patients and members of the public need to have a source of information they can trust."

Notes to Editors

Background information about the review: **here** (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/who-review.644.en.html>)

The full WHO report is available on the following websites:

informedhealthonline.org

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InformedHealthOnline website (URL:
<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.644.en.html>)

WHO website (URL:
<http://www.euro.who.int/pharmaceuticals>)

Contact: information@iqwig.de (URL:
<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/mailto:information@iqwig.de>)

Glossary

evidence

Evidence is what we call scientific proof from well-conducted, good-quality scientific trials that have been carefully designed to answer specific questions. Depending on the types of questions, different scientific research methods (types of study) are most appropriate to find reliable answers to these questions. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), for example, are the best way to get reliable evidence on the effectiveness of medical treatments (interventions). This type of study, however, is not the best form of evidence for all possible questions, and does not provide the best answers to all kinds of questions, either. Epidemiological studies, for example, are very suitable for establishing well-founded proof for the spreading of a disease in the population.

Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at [**www.informedhealthonline.org**](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)

Disclaimer

This information was prepared and published by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). It is based on the evidence and other scientific literature available at the time of publication. The information is intended for the use of patients in Germany. It is not intended to for use to diagnose illnesses and the information is not intended to substitute for medical advice.