Pan American Sanitary Organization

World Health Organization

XV Pan American Sanitary Conference

X Meeting Regional Committee

San Juan, Puerto Rico
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Topic 36: ADVERTISING OF MEDICINAL PRODUCTS

(Paper presented by the Delegation of Panama)

It has been the constant concern of the governments that the public have available medicinal products of the best quality at the lowest price. To that end they have adopted various measures, among them, analysis of pharmaceutical products in order to guarantee their purity and the accuracy of their qualitative and quantitative formulas, and registration of the product before permitting their free sale, as well as regulation of the price that the consumer must pay.

All these measures have been effective, but there is one aspect of the problem that has not received the attention it merits, if the complete protection of the public is actually desired, and that is control of the advertising of such medicinal products.

Such advertising may be classified in two definite groups: that which is done to promote or stimulate prescriptions by professionals and that which is intended to achieve distribution among the public.

The former is directed only to accredited physicians, dentists, and veterinarians for their professional use. In general, this advertising complies with ethical principles and presents no danger to the community.

The latter, and this is the group to which we refer here, is aimed directly at the public through the radio, newspapers, brochures, magazines, television, and motion pictures. This advertising, designed essentially to increase the sale of a specific product, is in the majority of instances bases on misleading and false phrases. Examples of this are the following frequently used terms: "safe," "magic," "the best," "the most active," "unexcelled," "irreplaceable," "marvelous," "miraculous," "unbelievable". Some advertisements allude to secret formulas or medical, chemical, or pharmaceutical discoveries. Others guarantee, or assure the cure of some ailment or disease. Some even use testimonials from private persons, or endorsements by doctors, dentists, pharmacists, veterinarians, nurses, and midwives. This type of popular advertising not only presents false information to the public but also encourages self-medication, with all its terrible consequences.

For example, a person, in order to combat a certain ailment or affliction, may follow the recommendations he sees or hears every day, and take one of those products that strikes him as good. This may mask the symptoms and delay his visit to the doctor, so that when he does go he is often too late to be cured or even helped.

This problem is presented to the Conference because it is in the interest of the Member Countries of the Pan American Sanitary Organization to provide a satisfactory solution, and to do so requires the cooperation of all.

The measures that the government of any one country may take to control the advertising of medicinal products in domestic information media are ineffective because, with the rapid means of communication and the wide distribution of printed matter, well-known foreign newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets are sold, and broadcasts from powerful foreign transmitters are received in the various countries. The same will soon be true of television programs.

Moreover, much of the advertising that reaches a country is prepared by large advertising agencies located abroad. To change this advertising in the country in which it is going to be used is a burdensome, lengthy, and costly process, especially since it is often in the form of mats or engravings for newspapers and recordings for broadcasting.

Business unquestionably requires advertising of any products to be offered to the consumer, but the Delegation of Panama believes that, when it is a matter of medicinal products, advertising should be under strict control. Advertising of products for prescription should be directed solely to physicians, dentists, and veterinarians. General advertising of these products must eliminate all false statements and any presentation which tends to deceive the public. It is therefore natural that the public health authorities of each country should control and approve in advance advertising of medicinal products within their territory. This would also have the advantage of obligating the large agencies that prepare advertising for various areas of the world to do so in such form as could be accepted in toto or with very few changes, by the authorities of the countries in which it is to be used.

For these reasons, the Delegation of Panama suggests that the XV Pan American Sanitary Conference study the problem and, if it considers it advisable, request the Director to include it on the agenda of the next meeting of the Directing Council.

Pan American Sanitary Organization

World Health Organization

XV Pan American Sanitary Conference

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Topic 37: PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR THE NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU

Draft Resolution Presented by the Delegation of Costa Rica

The XV Pan American Sanitary Conference,

Considering that neither the Constitution of the Pan American Sanitary Organization nor the regulations in force establish a clear and detailed procedure for the election of the Director, and that they do not set forth the terms and duration of his contract;

Bearing in mind that the Member Governments have encountered difficulties in interpreting the Constitution and the regulations;

Considering that the necessity of clarifying the texts of the Constitution and the regulations has been apparent at the time of the election of the Director at previous Conferences and at the XV Conference; and

Considering that a method for selecting and nominating candidates should be adopted sufficiently in advance of a Conference,

RESOLVES:

To recommend to the Executive Committee the establishment of a working party to make a study of the legal problems and procedures related to the nomination and election of the Director of the Bureau and present, after consultation with the Member Governments, the said study to the Directing Council for final approval and adoption.