

approved, the standardized information will be posted on the website of the Board.

238. The Board calls on all Governments that have not yet done so to submit to it their current national regulations and restrictions applicable to international travellers carrying medical preparations containing internationally controlled substances for personal use, pursuant to Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions 45/5, 46/6 and 50/2. In addition, Governments should notify the Board of any changes in their national jurisdictions in the scope of control of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances relevant to travellers under medical treatment with internationally controlled substances, in accordance with Commission resolution 50/2.

## E. Special topics

### 1. Prescription drug disposal initiatives

239. The Board has repeatedly drawn the attention of Governments to the growing public health threat caused by increasing global prevalence rates of prescription drug abuse. The abuse of prescription drugs has increased in all regions, with those prevalence rates, in some countries, outpacing the rates for illegal drugs.

240. While many factors may have contributed to that development, the Board notes that the increased prevalence in prescription drug abuse has, to a large extent, been driven by the widespread availability of those drugs, as well as to erroneous perceptions that prescription drugs are less susceptible to abuse than illicit drugs. The non-prescription use of those drugs for self-medication has further exacerbated the problem.

241. One of the main sources of prescription drugs diverted from licit channels for abuse identified by public health officials is the presence in households of prescription drugs that are no longer needed or used for medical purposes. Surveys of abuse prevalence undertaken in several countries have revealed that a significant percentage of individuals abusing prescription drugs for the first time obtained the drug from a friend or family member who had acquired them legally.

242. In the light of that situation, the international community has recognized that an effective means of addressing the growing threat posed by prescription drug abuse and addiction is to focus efforts on supply reduction and

public awareness initiatives. Among the measures being increasingly used are prescription drug disposal initiatives, including prescription drug take-back days.

243. The setting-up of such initiatives in many jurisdictions has yielded significant results at a relatively low cost. In the United States alone, since the staging of the first prescription drug take-back day in 2010, such initiatives have resulted in the removal of 1,733 tons of prescription drugs from circulation and possible abuse. In staging and publicizing these initiatives, public health authorities have helped increase public awareness of the dangers of prescription drug abuse and of the importance of ensuring that unused prescription drugs that are no longer needed are disposed of safely.

244. The importance of these measures has been recognized by the international community, including by the States members of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Accordingly, in March 2013, the Commission adopted its resolution 56/8, entitled “Promoting initiatives for the safe, secure and appropriate return for disposal of prescription drugs, in particular those containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control”.

245. In its resolution 56/8, the Commission called upon States to consider the adoption of a variety of courses of action to address prescription drug abuse in cooperation with various stakeholders such as public health officials, pharmacists, pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors, physicians, consumer protection associations and law enforcement agencies, in order to promote greater awareness of the risks associated with the non-medical use of prescription drugs, in particular those containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

246. In adopting that resolution, the Commission has recognized that programmes for the safe disposal of prescription drugs are an integral part of any strategy to address prescription drug abuse and may be an effective means of raising public awareness of the dangers of the harm caused by that abuse.

247. Drawing on the encouraging results achieved in many States in the implementation of successful initiatives for the disposal of prescription drugs, in its resolution 56/8 the Commission encouraged Member States to exchange good practices, to be emulated in States that had not yet implemented such activities or that sought to strengthen or optimize existing measures.

248. The Board fully endorses the courses of action set forth in Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 56/8

and calls upon all States that have not already done so to develop comprehensive strategies to address prescription drug abuse, including mechanisms to ensure the safe return and disposal of medications possessing psychoactive properties, particularly those containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances. The Board also recommends that States consider expanding these programmes to include all substances having psychoactive properties, whether available with a prescription or without.

249. Although the establishment of safe disposal initiatives is an important tool for addressing prescription drug abuse, that measure alone will not suffice. As such, the Board wishes to reiterate that any comprehensive strategy aimed at tackling the problem of prescription drug abuse must also address the root causes of the excessive supply of prescription drugs, including overprescribing by medical professionals, “doctor shopping” and inadequate controls on the issuing and filling of prescriptions.

## 2. Illegal Internet pharmacies

250. For several years, the Board has drawn the attention of Governments and other members of the international community to the phenomenon of illegal Internet pharmacies and the need to better protect the public against the illegal distribution of preparations containing internationally controlled substances. Substances frequently sold through such pharmacies include opioid analgesics, central nervous system stimulants and tranquillizers. To assist Governments in addressing the problem, the Board developed, with the support and contribution of national experts and relevant international organizations, Internet service providers, financial services and pharmaceutical associations, *Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet*.<sup>19</sup> The guidelines, which were launched in 2009, are aimed at assisting Governments in formulating national legislation and policies for regulatory, law enforcement and other authorities with regard to the use of the Internet to dispense, purchase, export or import internationally controlled substances.

251. To assess the implementation of the guidelines and to obtain information on good practices in addressing the unauthorized sale of internationally controlled substances using the Internet, the Board sent a questionnaire to Governments in March 2013; responses were received from 78 countries and territories throughout the world. Most Governments reported that, on their territory, the

sale of internationally controlled substances by Internet pharmacies was prohibited, and some expressly stated that not allowing Internet pharmacies to operate on their territory had limited the problem.

252. Where Internet pharmacies are permitted, such pharmacies must generally meet the same legislative requirements that are applicable to storefront pharmacies. Some pharmacies do not use the Internet to sell internationally controlled substance, as they consider the risk of diversion to be too large. In some cases, applications to open Internet pharmacies are examined by law enforcement authorities prior to being approved.

253. Many Governments reported having implemented the guideline calling on Governments to adopt national legislation on the designated routing and inspection of mail and other items handled by international courier companies. Legislation and policies in place normally allow border service agencies to examine pharmaceuticals that are shipped by mail. The extent to which consignments of medication containing internationally controlled substances are inspected varies. In some cases, all consignments containing any medicinal product are examined; in others, inspections are carried out at regular intervals with a view to detecting illegal shipments. In addition, countries may have in place specific requirements for the distribution of medicinal products by mail (or as one Government reported) may not allow narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances to be shipped through the postal system unless they are to be used as test or reference standards.

254. One central concern is the potential danger to the health of customers who have procured over the Internet pharmaceutical products containing internationally controlled substances. National efforts have been made to protect such customers from harm. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, for example, which has members in Canada, New Zealand and the United States, has developed the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) programme, whereby participating pharmacies must comply with a number of licensing and inspection requirements. Each VIPPS pharmacy site is identified by a hyperlink seal displayed on the website; by clicking on the seal, website visitors are able to access verified information about the pharmacy. Similarly, since 2 January 2013, member States of the European Union are required to apply directive 2011/62/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union, which, inter alia, requires each member State to introduce a “common logo” on websites of legally operating online pharmacies. The logo must be clearly displayed on every

<sup>19</sup>United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.XI.6.