

Chapter V.

Ensuring the availability of internationally controlled drugs in emergency situations

259. Most narcotic drugs and a large number of psychotropic substances controlled under the international treaties are indispensable for medical practice. Simplified control measures are in place for the provision of internationally controlled medicines for emergency medical care. Emergencies are defined as follows:

Any acute situation (e.g. earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, epidemics, conflicts, displacement of populations) in which the health conditions of a group of individuals are seriously threatened unless immediate and appropriate action is taken, and which demands an extraordinary response and exceptional measures.⁶¹

260. In 1996, the Board, together with WHO, devised simplified control procedures for the export, transport and import of controlled medicines for emergency medical care. The simplified regulations remove the need for import authorizations, provided that the import and delivery are handled by established international, governmental and/or non-governmental organizations engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance in health matters recognized by the control authorities of the exporting countries. Those simplified procedures are available to all States in the Model Guidelines for the International Provision of Controlled Medicines for Emergency Medical Care.

261. Emergency situations arise following natural or man-made catastrophic events in which the need to provide treatment to the many victims leads to a

sudden need for and an acute shortage of medicines. Many of those needed medicines contain narcotic drugs, such as morphine, or psychotropic substances, such as pentazocine, both of which are under international control. Under normal circumstances, the import and transport of those medications are subject to strict regulatory requirements. However, in catastrophic situations compliance may delay the urgent delivery of medications for emergency humanitarian relief, as national authorities may be unable to take the administrative steps required.

262. In responding to humanitarian crises, the Board takes active steps to hasten the supply of controlled medicines by reminding all exporting countries that clear guidelines are in place for the international provision of controlled medicines for emergency medical care and that countries can apply those simplified control procedures to hasten the supply of urgently needed medicines. The Board also informs providers of humanitarian assistance about the simplified regulations.

263. Competent national authorities may allow the export of internationally controlled substances to affected countries even in the absence of import authorizations or estimated requirements. Emergency deliveries need not be included in the estimates of the receiving country, and exporting Governments may wish to use parts of their special stocks of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for that purpose.

264. This solution has been available for a number of years. The Board invites Governments and humanitarian relief agencies to bring to its attention any problems encountered in making deliveries of controlled medicines in emergency situations.

⁶¹World Health Organization, Model Guidelines for the International Provision of Controlled Medicines for Emergency Medical Care.

265. In addition, the Board also reminds all States that, under international humanitarian law, parties to armed conflicts have an obligation not to impede the provision of medical care to civilian populations located in territories under their effective control. This includes access to necessary narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.