



Rational Drug Use in Iran: A Call for Action.

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Rational Use of Drugs (RUD) is at the core of pharmaceutical best practice. It requires that “patients receive medications appropriate to their clinical needs, in doses that meet their own individual requirements, for an adequate period of time, and at the lowest cost to them and their community” (1).

The National Committee on Rational Use of Drugs (NCRUD) was established in 1996 in Iran with the aim of promoting RUD. This committee is a core of 42 provincial committees, and responsible for setting the policies, guidelines and procedures related to promoting rational use of drugs. NCRUD collects the prescription data from all around the country and analyzes them, and evaluates the trend of prescription indicators and patterns of drug use in the country. According to the committee’s last report (2), average items per prescription ranged from 2.1-3.6. Almost 45% of patients received antibiotics, 41% injectable drugs and 23% corticosteroids, which in comparison with the report of 2007 the numbers have decreased a little but still higher than World Health Organization (WHO) standards and other countries (3). These indicators show that the prescribing and use of medicines in Iran, like many other low-income

developing countries (4), is suboptimal. Polypharmacy, poor patient compliance and overuse of antibiotics and injectable drugs are examples of irrational use of drugs in Iran. There are many reasons for this dismal situation. Key among them are inappropriate prescribing habit by physicians, improper supervision by regulatory bodies, lack of written and effective guidelines, lack of clear policy, also insufficient drug information, irrational demand by patients and socio-cultural factors. The gap between knowledge and practice is common element among physicians and legislators.

The use of medicines in Iran is dictated by the prescribers. Pharmacy services are often inadequate and therefore patients are unaware of important information on drug use. Currently, an estimate of 3400 branded formulations is sold on the Iranian market. All medicines can be available as Over-The- Counter (OTC) without prescription. Self-medication is widespread among educated people. Doctors are considered supreme by patients and their reluctance to clearly explain prescriptions results in poor compliance. The regulations for medicines sale and enforcement mechanisms are not transparent and strong enough.

To combat the situations described above, the following strategies and interventions, would assist to promote rational use of medicine:

- An Essential Drug List (preferably subdivided by level of care (health center, general hospital, ...) and hospital or departmental formularies are important and useful tools for developing RUD.

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- Educational strategies (the most effective as face to face intervention) and therapeutic guidelines (with focused educational campaigns) can be effective in improving rational prescribing (4).

- Regulatory measures such as scheduling drugs for different sales levels (over the counter, pharmacy only, prescription only) and procedures to evaluate drugs and products information before market approval is granted could be promote rational prescribing (4).

- The role of pharmacist in Iran is underutilized. They should play a key role in promoting RUD. Involvement of clinical pharmacists in the development of prescribing policy, treatment guidelines and educational programs should be encouraged.

All these will be a reality when medicine manufacturers, distributors, prescribers, providers, consumers, and

regulating agencies play their role as they should. After all, attempts to promote RUD would be futile unless all the stakeholders are encouraged to follow the minimum ethics and norms in their respective practices.

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