

Agenda item 13.3. Substandard and falsified medical products

Belize thanks the Director General for the report on item 13.3. Access to safe, effective and quality medical products as a crucial element of Universal Health Coverage.

Every day, substandard and falsified medical products enter the global, regional and national supply chain systems resulting in socioeconomic cost and damage to health, stockouts, and not to mention, **dissatisfaction of patients and loss of trust in health systems**. Substandard and falsified medicines, vaccines, and other medical products not only increase disease prevalence, exacerbate antimicrobial resistance and produce adverse health effects, they also waste resources, result in economic loss and increase out-of-pocket spending on medical treatment.

To address these challenges, Belize has made significant efforts towards addressing substandard and falsified medical products in the country:

- In 2020, Belize became an Associate Member of the WHO Program for International Drug Monitoring (WHO PIDM). This accomplishment is the result of a focused effort on the part of the government of Belize with support from PAHO to strengthen regulatory functions including registration, pharmacovigilance, and post market surveillance.
- Belize's strategy to improve its regulatory system makes use of new regional systems available to CARICOM countries, including CARPHA's Caribbean Regulatory System, and its market surveillance reporting platform, VigiCarib.
- Belize participates in the regular global Regulatory Updates meetings, the monthly PAHO regional Pharmacovigilance network meetings and the falsified and substandard medicines meetings.
- It has launched the 10th Edition of the Belize Drug Formulary and Therapeutic Manual, 2020-2023, as well as the Over-the-Counter Medicines List.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, it issued advisories on the unauthorized use of medicines and remedies for COVID-19 that are not supported by evidence, according to PAHO/WHO guidance.
- The MOHW has identified focal persons for the WHO Global Benchmarking Tool (GBT) for Evaluation of National Regulatory Systems of Medical Products. Findings from this evaluation could be used to develop an Institutional Development Plan (IDP) to further strengthen the regulatory capacity of Belize.
- In response to client complaints about substandard medicines and evidence of such, the country is making increased efforts to procure medicines from suppliers who meet the required standards in the country.
- The Drug Inspectorate Unit is being strengthened to ensure that the drugs being delivered to Belize comply with the specification and requirements as per the annual tendering process. This unit is supported by the Chemist and Druggist Act of Belize.

We strongly believe that through strong collaboration and a shared vision, we can strengthen health products selection, quantification, procurement and forecasting in Belize and globally.

Agenda item 13.5 Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

Belize also thanks the Director General for the report on item 13.5. Over the last decades, the spread of the emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases has exposed the shortcomings of the Infection Prevention and Control Programs (IPC) globally, even though the gaps tend to be more evident in low- and middle-income countries and in health facilities with limited resources. Additionally, the increasing incidence of health care-associated infections (HAIs) and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which jeopardize the safety and wellbeing of the patients are significant justification to improve IPC locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

Being aware of the magnitude of the IPC issues and based on some lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Belize is taking important steps to comply with the vision of the Global Strategy on Infection Prevention and Control (GSIPC) with a people-centered approach and prioritizing actions to ensure that by 2030, everyone accessing or providing health care is safe from associated infections. This will be made possible through the effective governance and leadership of the Ministry of Health and Wellness in implementing a series of strategic actions aimed at promoting adherence to Infection Prevention and Control practices.

The strategic actions will create an enabling environment to comply with at least 4 of the 8 strategic directions of the vision and objectives of the Global Strategy for Infection Prevention and Control (GSIPC) through the following:

- Advocacy and communications
- Data for action
- IPC integration and coordination, and
- Collaboration and stakeholders' support

Belize remains fully committed in strengthening these areas in order to support the robust implementation of practical and evidence-based IPC policies and programs to protect health care workers and the entire Belizean population.