

RATIONAL USE

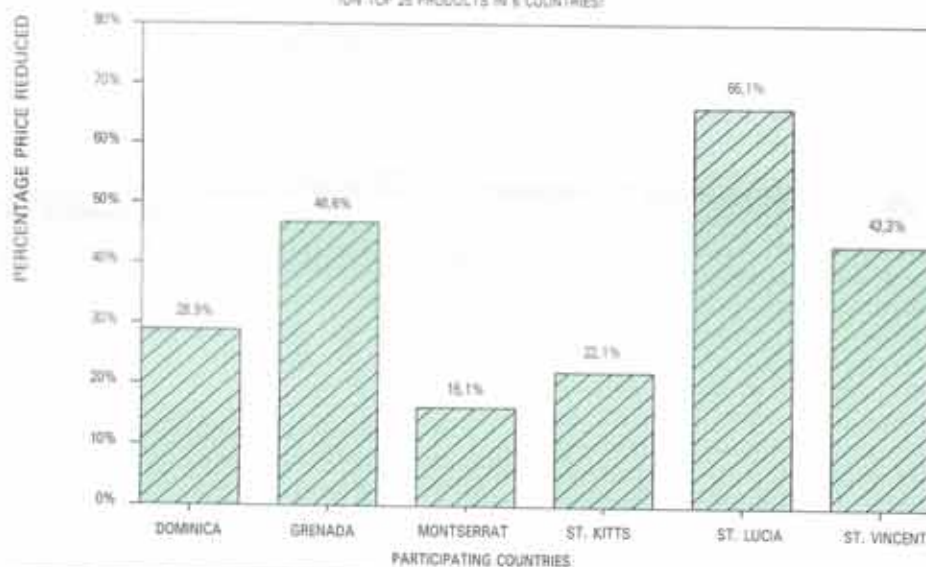
Caribbean countries pool resources to lower drug costs

CONCERNED by irrational use and rising prices of pharmaceuticals, members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) established in 1986 the Eastern Caribbean Drug Service. The new agency provides pharmaceutical services to the participating countries of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St Kitts, Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines. The British Virgin Islands are in the process of joining and Antigua is expected to join in the course of the year.

price reductions obtained on a market based on the top 25 products in each of the participating countries. Price reductions obtained on the second cycle contracts (1988-89) matched or exceeded those of the first cycle.

In addition to the procurement service, the ECDS assists with quality assurance, especially through selection and monitoring of suppliers who are invited to tender and awarded ECDS contracts.

DRUG MARKET BASKET PRICE REDUCTIONS
ON TOP 25 PRODUCTS IN 6 COUNTRIES



Centralized purchasing...

As a new public enterprise ECDS's most crucial service is a centralized public tendering for pharmaceuticals. The first ECDS contracts with suppliers were effective 1 June 1987. 100 suppliers had been invited to tender, 66 responded, and 32 were awarded regional contracts. Products are shipped directly from the suppliers to the central medical stores in each country. ECDS is responsible for regional coordination, administration and paperwork.

Each country had established a special account with the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) to fund its purchases from ECDS pharmaceutical suppliers promptly. Because of the stimulation of private sector competition through the public tendering process, and the assurance of prompt payment to suppliers, the ECDS has reduced the unit prices of pharmaceuticals in the Region by a weighted average of 44%. Price reductions for the largest country, St Lucia, were over 66%. The graph printed here illustrates

Meeting members' needs...

In order to ensure that this new public enterprise is responsive to the needs of the ministries it serves, all policy or strategic decisions are made by the country representatives who serve on the ECDS Policy Board or one of its two Sub-committees. The six ministries of health comprise the Policy Board. The chief pharmacists or supply officers for each country comprise the Tenders Sub-committee. This Sub-committee selects the products required, chooses the suppliers from whom tenders will be invited and adjudicates the award of ECDS contracts.

The Tenders Sub-committee also assists the Formulary and Therapeutics Sub-committee, comprised of senior physicians from each island, who have been appointed by their respective ministries. The Formulary and Therapeutics Sub-committee is responsible for both the regional and country formulary process, including the development and publication of a regional formulary and therapeutics manuals that can be used as a reference tool by physicians, pharmacists and other health care workers.

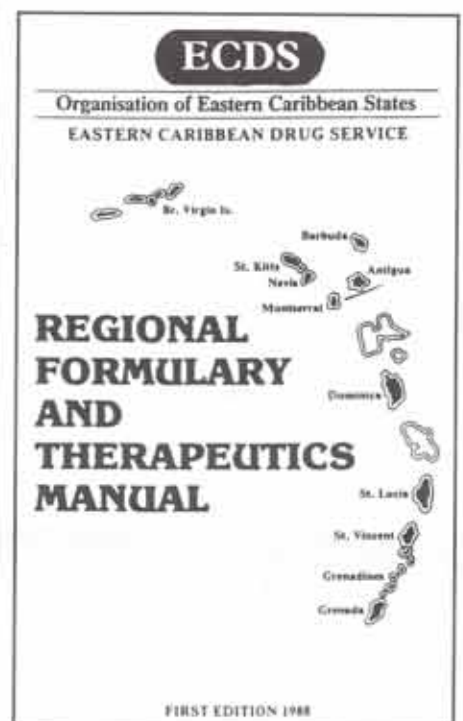


The Eastern Caribbean Drug Service also assists members with quality control, especially through selection and monitoring of suppliers.

A regional drug list...

Beginning in mid-1987, strong emphasis has been given to regional formulary development with the goal of adopting one regional list of drugs for all participating countries. The regional formulary list is based on drugs common to most national formularies of participating countries, the WHO List of Essential Drugs, and other reference sources. The list now contains 238 drugs with a total of 348 different dosage forms.

The ECDS published the first edition of the ECDS Regional Formulary and Therapeutics manual in July 1988. The 320 page pocket-sized manual* contains concise drug information for doctors, pharmacists and nurses. The drug monographs include the usual headings for indications, adverse reactions and dosages, as well as information on clinically significant drug interactions. Prescribing guidelines are included for specific patient types, such as pregnancy, lactating mothers, renal and hepatic impairment, pediatrics and the elderly. Suggestions for patient counselling are listed for each drug. Prescribers are encouraged to consider relative costs of therapy. The manual also provides comparative daily costs for each drug within a therapeutic class.



The ECDS fosters professional networks in the Caribbean Region through frequent professional meetings and a recently initiated newsletter. Information exchange and news of drug programmes in other developing countries is always welcome.

* Copies of the ECDS formulary manual can be obtained at a price of US\$15 (to cover costs) by writing to Francis Burnett, Chairman, Editorial Committee, Eastern Caribbean Drug Service, P.O. Box 179, Castries, St Lucia, West Indies. □



Photo WHO/P. Merchez