

HCWH Position on Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical Pollutants – September 2015

Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical Pollutants (EPPPs) in the environment have been identified as an emerging environmental concern, with more than 600 pharmaceuticals having been detected in the environment worldwide (in water, soil, sludge, and organisms)¹. Due to the nature of the active ingredients in pharmaceuticals, which were designed to develop a response in humans and animals in low concentrations, they often remain unchanged during their consumption and excretion and there is growing concern about pharmaceuticals building up in the environment. This harms the environment and, in the long-term, human health.

Of the pharmaceutical residues found in the environment, antibiotics have some of the most serious consequences, and there are major public health concerns about the presence of antibiotic-resistant pathogens. It is estimated that 300 million premature deaths will occur over the next 35 years as a consequence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) alone.² The international community has recognised the severity of AMR and has called for global action, with the WHO having released a global action plan in May 2015, setting out strategic objectives to strengthen the fight against AMR. At a EU level, the European Commission launched its own action plan in 2011 to tackle the issue of AMR across the Member States.

The ICCM4 marks the first step towards the development a strategic approach for the management of pharmaceuticals globally and, therefore, facilitating the achievement of the Johannesburg Declaration goals. HCWH supports these developments and works towards recognising EPPPs as detrimental to human health and the environment. It is essential that all stakeholders are involved in ensuring that the release of pharmaceuticals at every stage during the life cycle of a drug (production, use, and disposal) is minimised. HCWH aims to raise public awareness about pharmaceuticals and their impact on the environment and advocates for the development transnational laws to control and reduce pharmaceuticals in the environment. Specifically, HCWH works with health professionals to raise awareness about impact and prescription practices and with public authorities to improve collection methods for unused medicines and safe treatment and disposal. In addition, HCWH invites governments and stakeholders to take part in global efforts to reduce pharmaceutical pollution and, in particular:

- **Raise awareness among the public about pharmaceutical pollution in the environment.**
- **Create an international network of experts for knowledge-sharing.**
- **Build capacity to identify and research emission at every stage of the life cycle of pharmaceuticals.**
- **Develop global data on pathways and sources of pharmaceutical pollution in the environment.**
- **Minimise the impact of pharmaceuticals on the environment through a multi-sectorial approach at every stage of the life cycle (production, use and, disposal).**
- **Create transnational laws to harmonise control measures and reduce pharmaceutical pollution.**

HCWH and its network of Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (www.greenhospitals.net) works to transform the healthcare sector worldwide so that it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment. As an international coalition of more than 500 organisations in 53 countries, HCWH is a leading advocate for environmental health and justice across the globe. For more information, visit www.noharm.org.

¹ Umwelt Bundesamt (2014). Pharmaceuticals in the environment-the global perspective: Occurrence, effects, and potential cooperative action under SAICM. http://www.pharmaceuticals-in-the-environment.org/files/en/bereich_4/application/pdf/pharmaceuticals_en_141210_screen.pdf

² Review on Antimicrobial Resistance (2015). Antimicrobial Resistance: Tackling a global health crisis: initial steps. <http://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/Report-52.15.pdf>