

Guidelines for the Donation of Medications

Advances in the treatment of HIV/AIDS with combination therapies and medications to prevent and treat opportunistic infections have offered renewed hope for some People Living with HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the majority -- the millions of people around the world who do not have access or who cannot afford the most basic treatment for HIV/AIDS.

The Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+) and the International Community of Women Living HIV/AIDS (ICW) have developed this document to assist grassroots organisations and individuals in collecting and donating medications to recipients in the developing world. GNP+ and ICW are not endorsing organisations or individuals involved in this effort. This document is offered as a tool to assist both donors and receivers.

Many grassroots Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and People Living with HIV/AIDS have mobilised to collect unused medications which are donated to individuals in need, living in developing countries.

The World Health Organisation has developed guidelines for drug donations that reflect a consensus between the major international agencies active in humanitarian relief. The guidelines aim to improve the quality of drug donations. They are not international regulations, but are intended to serve as a basis for national or institutional guidelines, to be reviewed, adapted and implemented by governments and organisations co-ordinating drug donations. This document can be obtained by contacting the WHO website(<http://www.who.int/>).

Issues to Consider

Donated drugs should be based on need:

All donated drugs must correspond to recipients' specified needs. Drugs should not be sent without the prior consent of the recipient. A co-ordinated relationship must be established between donors and receivers to assess the needs of recipients and the supply available to the donors.

Demand for donations is much greater than the supply:

The supply of donated medications must be ensured for at least six months. In the case of anti-retroviral medications (ART), there should be a continuous supply for the recipient. It is extremely important that anti-retroviral medications be provided in approved combinations, since monotherapy is no longer recommended and can be harmful. Working with individuals and organisations that have the experience and infrastructure to receive donated medications may help ensure that the supply is uninterrupted.

Legal Issues—Donors: Individuals involved in collecting medications, ordinarily disposed of under state and/or national laws, may be subject to prosecution. Technically, shipping medications to recipients can be considered smuggling, which in some situations and jurisdictions is sanctioned by state and national governments. If an organisation is involved in donating and is also receiving government funding, the organisation could be in jeopardy of losing its funding.

Legal Issues—Recipients: Drugs, or their generic equivalent, should be approved for use in the recipient country and appear on the national list of essential drugs, or if a national list is not available, on the WHO Model List of Essential Drugs, *unless specifically requested otherwise by the recipient*. Drug donations can be made for sudden outbreaks of uncommon or emerging diseases, since drugs may not yet be approved for use in the recipient's country. Customs agents may hold or dispose of donated medications. Shipments may require special permits. Imported goods can be taxed. It is vital that recipients work with airlines, mail services and customs to explain that medications are being sent for humanitarian relief efforts to avert these actions.

Medical Supervision and Diagnostic Testing:

Ideally, medications should be sent via a health care provider in the donor country, to ensure that those in most in need receive treatment. It is dangerous to send medications to a recipient if they do not have access to adequate medical supervision or diagnostic testing, such as viral load, CD4 counts or basic blood work. HIV medications need experienced professional monitoring due to the many side effects that they can cause. Many medications are toxic and if not prescribed appropriately can lead to viral resistance and other serious health problems.

Expired medications: It is important to ensure medication arrives before the expiration date. The expiration date varies from drug to drug, depending on the following factors: if the package is open or closed; the desiccant utilised; and the environmental conditions (extreme cold or hot) that the product encounters during their journey to the hands of the patient.

Packaging and Labelling: Medications must be packaged and labelled appropriately to include the generic name, batch number, dosage form, name of manufacturer, quantity in the container, storage requirements and expiration date from both manufacturer and, in some situations, the pharmacy where the medication was dispensed. Receiving drugs under different and often unknown brand names is confusing for recipients and can be dangerous to patients. All donations must be labelled in a language that is easily understood by health professionals and other recipients.

Mixing Open Bottles: Open bottles of the same medications or different medications should never be mixed by donors or recipients as the expiration dates may be different.

Transporting and storing medications:

Medications may be exposed to extreme environmental conditions during their journey to the recipient. Many HIV/AIDS medications require their own unique storage requirements, such as refrigeration. It is imperative to enclose this information with medications to ensure that medications continue to be efficacious and give the maximum benefit to the recipient.

Treatment Information: Treatment information must be provided with donated medications so health care professional prescribing medications and patients have a good understanding of the regimens. This information must be provided in a language that is easily understood by health care professionals and patients in the recipient country.

This document was prepared by the members of GNP+ North America with assistance from GNP+ and ICW



GNP+

P.O. Box 11726
1001 GS Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31 20 423-4114
+31 20 423-4224 fax
gnp@gn.apc.org

ICW

2C Leroy House
436 Essex Road
London, N1 3QP
United Kingdom
+44 171 704-0606
+44 171 704-8070
icw@gn.apc.org