
Adopted by the FIP Council as an FIP statement of policy in Sydney in 2003, transformed to guidelines in 2014

FIP GUIDELINES

Provisioning ships with medicines for their effective use

Introduction

To ensure safe and effective use of medications on board ships, large international shipping vessels carry medications and other medical supplies. This practice ensures that emergencies can be dealt with effectively when sailing on the open sea. Requirements regarding these medical supplies are often specified by national regulations. For ships whose home nations do not have their own regulations on medical safety on board ships, the WHO published a guide in 1988 with recommended supplies and background information.

In international trade, ships often have a crew drawn from different nations and sail worldwide. Ships may be registered in one country, have a captain from another and a crew from a number of different countries. English will be used as the language of communication. The captain is responsible for the management and use of medication on board.

Pharmacists who specialise in supplying ships do not supply medicines to sick patients, as they would do in their position as general community pharmacists, but, instead, supply ships with medicinal and other medical products for potential patients.

These pharmacists have specific tasks:

- to inspect current ship-based medical supplies to ensure fitness for purpose
- to manage and supervise the provision of new medical supplies with appropriate information
- to advise shipping companies and/or captains regarding shipboard medical equipment

Some of these pharmacists may also:

- teach refresher courses for captains and others; and
- act as consultants for national regulators or policy makers

Recent research has shown that, although pharmacists encounter a variety of problems, their main concerns relate to factors affecting the crew on board, medicines from different countries with different names and regulations and information in different



languages. It also showed that the responsible crew expressed a great need for more or better information in the form of a manual. Crews reported several problems with medication supply and information on board.

In the light of these concerns, the FIP

recommends that

- An international forum should be established to develop a global quality management system for the supply of medicines to ships and measures to ensure their quality and safe and effective use.

and undertakes

- To work with the WHO to develop a revised international medical guide for ships reflecting the policies that:
 - due to the decrease of crew numbers on most ships, the quantities of individual medicines held in stock should be reduced;
 - obsolete medicines should be replaced by up-to-date products, selected in accordance with current evidence-based, rational pharmacotherapy;
 - the list of products to be held in stock should be updated more frequently;
 - a standardised labelling system and appropriate information on use, applicable in all countries in the world, should be introduced.
- to cooperate with IMHA (International Maritime Health Association), IMO (International Maritime Organisation) and ILO (International Labour Organisation) to ensure there is emergency medical care and medical safety on board ships.

FIP will consult experts with a view to developing similar statements of policy on medical supplies on other forms of transportation such as aircraft and coastal shipping.