

Europe Ticker +++



Pharmacies to be allowed to write prescriptions

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Easing the burden of British GPs?

British medical associations are alarmed that the Ministry of Health is apparently planning to allow pharmacists to prescribe and dispense medicines that previously could only be prescribed by physicians. The health policy debate about weakening the current prescribing authority of the medical profession is in full swing. Recently, the respected British daily newspaper *The Times* reported that pharmacists would “soon” be allowed to prescribe certain drugs independently, citing well-placed sources in the Ministry of Health. Contraceptives are said to be the first step, which will reportedly begin as early as December. The Ministry of Health said the move was to “reduce the burden on GP prescribers”. While pharmacists welcomed the move—Boots, the UK’s largest pharmacy chain, said it would begin prescribing in its 2,000 or so branches in early 2024—there was sharp criticism from the medical profession, which said it was highly problematic and would jeopardize patient safety.

Source: *Deutsche Ärztezeitung*, Germany

Telemedicine in railway stations

Criticism from French doctors

French doctors have condemned plans to set up telemedicine clinics in train stations. They say the railways should concentrate on providing better connections. Two days after the French railway company SNCF announced its intention to set up telemedicine clinics in around 300 stations by 2028, the national federation of doctors and medical associations have expressed their outrage at the plan. They see it as a further step towards cheap medicine in the financing of the national health system.

Telemedicine clinics would only be set up in underserved areas and only with the approval of the regional health authorities. Patients will be able to get medical advice via video consultation, receive vaccinations or have blood samples taken by a nurse, the SNCF said. Depending on local needs, other services will also be available, such as eye checks or sports checks and various hygiene products. These telemedicine clinics are not only aimed at rail commuters, but at the local population as a whole.

With 90 per cent of people in France living within ten kilometres of a railway station, the network of stations could be used to improve healthcare in rural areas, the SNCF explained. The healthcare company Loxamed will be responsible for the facilities.

The medical profession has reacted harshly to these plans. The SNCF would be well advised to focus on improving its rural services rather than reforming healthcare, they say. Better transport services could attract more doctors and health professionals to the countryside.

Source: *Deutsche Ärztezeitung*, Germany

Antibiotic Clovibactin effective
against multi-resistant bacteria

New discovery raises hopes

In a joint research project, international scientists have discovered a new antibiotic and deciphered its mechanism of action. Clovibactin, derived from a soil bacterium, is highly effective in attacking the cell walls of bacteria, including many multi-resistant nosocomial pathogens such as MRSA, as well as the widespread pathogens that cause tuberculosis, which affects many millions of people worldwide. The findings were published in the journal *Cell*.

The discovery was made by researchers from the University of Bonn, the German Centre for Infection Research (DZIF), the University of Utrecht, Northeastern University in Boston and NovoBiotic Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, USA. The mechanism of action shows that Clovibactin binds highly specifically to pyrophosphate groups of bacterial cell wall components. The pathogens cannot easily modify the cell wall components to undermine the antibiotic effect. After binding to the target, Clovibactin forms supramolecular fibrils that tightly enclose the target structures and further damage the bacterial cells. However, there is still a long way to go before the new antibiotic reaches the market.

Source: University of Bonn, Germany

Reference:

Shukla R, Peoples AJ, Ludwig KC, et al. A new antibiotic from an uncultured bacterium binds to an immutable target. *Cell*. 2023 Sep 14; 186(19): 4059–73. e27. doi: 10.1016/j.cell.2023.07.038.

The EU Commission's "Critical Medicines Act"

Preventing drug shortages across Europe

To avoid, or at least mitigate, another shortage of medicines like the one that hit many European countries in the winter of 2022/2023, 18 member states have backed an initiative launched by Belgium. In October, the European Commission published a non-legislative communication entitled "Addressing Medicine Shortages in the EU" (COM[2023] 672 final), also known as the "Critical Medicines Act".



This communication is largely based on the preparatory work carried out by EU member states. The main objective is to avoid or mitigate further drug shortages this winter and beyond. The communication outlines existing and planned measures and further steps to be taken in the context of the reform of pharmaceutical legislation. All measures are aimed at increasing the security of supply of essential medicines in the short and medium term and improving the resilience of supply chains. The Brussels authority plans to set up a Critical Medicines Alliance in early 2024. This will enable national authorities, industry, civil society organisations, the Commission and EU agencies to take coordinated and joint action at EU level to tackle drug shortages and supply-chain vulnerabilities.

Sources: Various