

Vienna, 15 March 2016

Hospital pharmacists: drive to expand provision of service for patients and increase pharmacological safety

- **Demand: just 17 percent of Austrian hospitals currently have their own dispensing pharmacies. Hospital pharmacist Dr. Gunar Stemer: seamless nationwide service needed to safeguard patient wellbeing.**
- **Project at Vienna General Hospital (AKH) confirms that presence of hospital pharmacists on wards aids better identification of problems with pharmaceutical therapies, leading to greater benefits for patients**

Dr. Gunar Stemer: “Austria currently has a shortfall in the number of hospital pharmacists, even though we play an important role in patient recovery. It is in patients’ best interest for this to change.”

From 16-18 March a group of over 3,500 international hospital pharmacists will meet at the Austria Center Vienna to discuss approaches, new technologies and the need for a partnership-based approach to treatment at the annual Congress of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP).

The issues:

- **In Austria just 17% of hospitals have their own pharmacies – calls for better nationwide coverage growing louder.**
- **With 0.6 hospital pharmacists for every 100 patients, Austria comes seventh from bottom in Europe. Other European countries such as United Kingdom, Norway and Sweden are significantly ahead, with more than three times as many hospital pharmacists per 100 patients than Austria.**
- **Significant successes in Vienna health care reform project: hospital pharmacists made around 3,800 suggestions regarding improvements to pharmaceutical therapies offered to patients, around 85% of which were implemented.**

It is a demand that every hospital patient in Austria would readily agree with. Dr. Gunar Stemer, head of the Department of Pharmaceutical Information and Clinical Pharmacy at Vienna General Hospital, member of the board of Austrian Hospital Pharmacists and

member of the Scientific Committee of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists outlined the issues: “We want to make sure that every patient is in a position to enjoy the benefits of the services offered by a hospital pharmacy when they receive hospital treatment. We ensure that essential medicines are available in hospitals, prepare medication ourselves, provide consultation and share information on a multitude of pharmaceuticals regarding correct dosages, side effects and pharmacological interaction with other medication.

Improved patient awareness leads to better therapeutic outcomes

Hospital pharmacists are present on the wards as clinical pharmacologists, an aspect of their work that involves giving patients comprehensive information on their medication. It is a key part of patient empowerment internationally, a process that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases their capacity to act on issues that they themselves define as important. Under this system, hospital pharmacists are at hand to give patients details of the precise effects as well as instructions on correct dosage and clarification of potential side effects and interactions. “Building up trust in this way often results in more effective therapies as it ensures that patients are more familiar with the pharmaceuticals prescribed to them. This also means that they also take their medication correctly and regularly – which is essential if it is to do its job properly,” Dr. Stemer said.

Medication errors can be avoided

Precise monitoring of pharmaceutical dosages and medication checks by clinical pharmacologists are effective ways to ensure that individual patient requirements are fully taken into account when it comes to their medication. This makes it possible to avoid over or under-dispensing medication and eliminate the dispensation of unnecessary pharmaceuticals “This increases patient safety enormously,” Dr. Stemer confirmed.

Important Vienna health care reform project: around 85% of therapeutic suggestions made by clinical pharmacologists are accepted and implemented.

Clinical pharmacologists at Vienna General Hospital have been working on cardiac surgery, maxillary surgery and trauma surgery wards for more than a year “We are not only involved in monitoring medication and the organisation of pharmaceutical supplies, but are also present when the doctors make their rounds, support medical staff and caregivers and provide patient consultation,” Dr. Stemer noted. Final consultations before a patient is discharged have proved particularly important. It provides an opportunity to answer specific questions and clear up any misunderstandings that the patient may have, and in the case of more complex medication the clinical physician can provide special training and practical tips on everyday usage. The results of the pioneering project speak for themselves – some 85% of the 3,800 or so suggestions for improving inpatient therapies were implemented. “We are proud of this achievement. The project has since been extended and will be expanded to take in other parts of the hospital,” he explained.

Individually prepared pharmaceuticals a significant part of personalised therapy

Hospital pharmacists are often called on for support when there are no suitable ready-made pharmaceutical products available, or in situations where high risk medication calls for special safety measures and personalised dosages are required. “In hospitals without their own pharmacies we are unable to use our services to support caregivers or reduce the burden placed on them. Consultation on correct dosage and the precise application of medication is often a decisive factor in treatment outcomes,” Dr. Stemer confirmed.

Support from hospital pharmacies in the event of supply bottlenecks

Increasingly, hospital pharmacists and doctors are forced to contend with supply bottlenecks. When this happens, these specialists are charged with identifying, selecting and sourcing replacement medication, to uphold the necessary course of therapy for patients. In some cases in-house pharmacies produce their own medications to temporarily bridge the gap. Dr. Stemer: “professional preparation of medication by hospital pharmacists is an important part of assuring security of supply. Treatments can be continued as a result.”

Day-to-day tasks optimised thanks to technological developments

Dr. Stemer increasingly sees it as the hospital physicians’ duty to ensure that they are always up to date with the latest technological breakthroughs. Depending on the technology, it can be used to provide additional support for doctors and caregivers, or optimise – or even simplify – day-to-day operations in hospital pharmacies. Examples include mobile health apps, clinical decision support systems, new production robots and special stock management technologies for use in hospital pharmacies.

Work on nationwide coverage in Austria

Out of a total of 279 hospitals in Austria just 46, or 17%, have their own pharmacies. Austria has an average of 0.6 hospital pharmacists for every 100 patients, earning it a place near the bottom of the European rankings. Scandinavian countries enjoy significantly better coverage, with an average of 2 hospital pharmacists per 100 patients. With this in mind, the Austrian Association of Hospital Pharmacists is working hard to increase the scope of its own network. “It is a particularly important step since we work very closely with doctors, caregivers and patients, helping to support them with many of our services. Hospital pharmacies are a quality seal for a hospital,” Stemer concluded.

About the EAHP

The European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) represents more than **18,000** hospital pharmacists in **34 European** Countries. It hosts the annual **EAHP Congress** which will bring **over 3,500 international hospital pharmacists** to the Austria Center Vienna this year.

About the Austria Center Vienna

The Austria Center Vienna is operated by Internationales Amtssitz- und Konferenzzentrum Wien, Aktiengesellschaft (IAKW-AG), which is also responsible for maintaining the Vienna International Centre (VIC). The Austria Center Vienna is Austria’s largest conference centre, with 24 halls, 180 meeting rooms, and some 42,000 square metres of event space (including 22,000 square metres of exhibition space), and is one of the top players on the international conference circuit. IAKW-AG and the Austria Center Vienna are headed by Chief Executive Officer Susanne Baumann-Söllner. www.acv.at.

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