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Title : ***Pharmacists at the fore: the role of pharmacists at international health organisations in improving access to quality medicines***

Abstract:

International health organisations (IHO), responsible for procuring pharmaceuticals for the countries in which they operate, have evolved within a global context that has changed significantly over the past 30 years. On the one hand, the pharmaceutical markets and pharmaceutical supply chains, historically concentrated in the Global North, have become increasingly globalised, with new pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors emerging across the world. On the other hand, the international health era has gradually transitioned into the *global* health era, and pharmaceuticals have become part of a new ‘magic bullet’ strategy adopted by many of these organisations.

This changing context has progressively placed pharmaceuticals and their management at the centre of IHOs’ activities. Yet, the role and value of pharmaceutical expertise have been overlooked for many years in these organisations. It was not until the early 2000s, when within a few IHOs the need to assess the quality of procured medicines emerged, that the professional judgement of pharmacists became recognised as necessary and pharmacists began to be recruited specifically for their expertise. Nevertheless, although there are more pharmacists working within IHOs today than 30 years ago, this situation remains neither uniform nor stable across organisations. Whereas pharmacists play a key role in assessing the risks associated with the procurement of substandard and falsified medicines in some IHOs, in many other organisations, their role remains largely limited to pharmaceutical storage management or to providing non-decision-making advice on pharmaceutical procurement.

Examining pharmaceutical practices within the distinctive transnational contexts of international health organisations provides an opportunity to reflect on the evolving role of pharmaceutical decision-making and to consider how it can be better aligned with the growing and increasingly pharmaceutical management needs of these IHOs.