

For immediate release

Medication Errors – the Most Common Adverse Event in Hospitals Threatens Patient Safety and Causes 160,000 Deaths per Year

BRUSSELS, 13 September 2022—The European Union needs to include medication safety and traceability systems in the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe and take other measures to reduce medication errors, the most common adverse events in hospitals, the [ECAMET Alliance](#) said Tuesday.

Unsafe medication practices and medication errors are leading causes of avoidable harm in healthcare systems across the world. **Medication-related harm represents 50% of all preventable harm in medical care worldwide**, with prescribing and monitoring errors among the highest sources. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated the cost associated with medication errors globally at 41.4 billion euros annuallyⁱ, not counting lost wages and productivity.

The WHO estimates that one death in every 1 million worldwide is caused by medication errors and has made this human tragedy the focus of its [Medication Without Harm](#) campaign. In the European Union, which has a population of 447 million, this would equate to 163,000 deaths per year. National figures partly confirm the scope of the problem, with [Germany](#), for example, reporting 19,000 deaths every year and [Spain](#), reporting 8,000 people killed every year as the result of medication errors.

Against this backdrop, ‘Medication Safety’ was selected as the theme for this year’s [World Patient Safety Day](#), which will be take place on the 17th of September.

The [ECAMET Alliance](#)—the European Collaborative Action on Medication errors and Traceability—advocates urgent actions to tackle these major patient safety issues as well as raise awareness of the high cost to society of medication errors and unsafe practices.

Clinical evidence shows that the introduction of medication traceability systems in hospitals is the most effective way to minimise medication errors, bringing about a potential overall reduction in medication errors of as much as 58%.ⁱⁱ Medication traceability systems include electronic prescriptions, electronic preparations, barcode medication administration and smart pumps, all connected to health records and hospital management systems.

An ECAMET-commissioned [survey](#) revealed a low level of implementation of medication traceability systems in European hospitals. Pharmacists clearly identified the most important areas to reduce medication errors were traceability systems such as electronic prescriptions, medication error surveillance and barcode-based medication administration systems. In addition, they identified that funding, human resources and lack of trained staff were the main barriers to implementing these improvements.

Given the magnitude of medication errors occurring, the lack of consistency and harmonisation of processes and the low implementation of medication traceability systems across European hospitals, the ECAMET Alliance believes that [urgent actions need to be implemented](#). These include:

1. Include medication safety in the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe, in the EU general pharmaceutical legislation and in Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan through medication traceability systems in a healthcare setting to minimise medication errors;

2. Prioritise strategic investments in medication traceability systems in the EU4Health program to minimise medication errors;
3. Foster the development and implementation of ECDC guidelines and key indicators on medication errors in EU healthcare settings;
4. Facilitate the systematic exchange of best practices between healthcare providers both at European and national levels to reduce medication errors in healthcare settings.

ABOUT THE EAASM

The European Alliance for Access to Safe Medicines (EAASM) is a non-profit, independent, pan-European initiative which represents a multi-sectorial coalition of organisations dedicated to protecting patient safety by ensuring access to safe and legitimate medicines. To find out more about the EAASM, please visit the website <https://eaasm.eu/en-gb/> and follow [@EAASMedS](#) on Twitter.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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i WHO calls for urgent action to reduce patient harm in healthcare, 2019

ii Effect of Bar-Code Technology on the Safety of Medication Administration

Eric G. Poon, M.D., M.P.H., et. al., N Engl J - Med 2010; 362:1698-1707, DOI: 10.1056/NEJMs0907115