Press Statement

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Date: **03/10/2018**

A better system in the making for testing efficiency of medicines and medical devices in the EU

Today patients and health budgets may sometimes be paying through the roof for expensive medicinal treatments that are not necessarily efficient. The position adopted today by the European Parliament, to pool efforts by Member States in testing how efficient medicines are, could change that.

MEPs were voting in plenary today on a proposal to harmonise and join up the way clinical assessments of medicines are made by Member States [1]. The proposal will affect all types of medicines and in particular those which are likely to be expensive. Because the results of these assessments are used to decide which medicines and medical devices get reimbursed by state or health insurance, patients should rest assured the treatments they get prescribed are doing what they're supposed to and function better than available alternatives.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said:

"At a time when health budgets are being squeezed and patients increasingly at risk of paying exorbitant amounts for their medicines, it makes a lot of sense for Member States to join up their medicinal assessments. The system would help make sure an anti-cancer drug is going to do exactly what it's supposed to, which is fight your cancer. There are cases today where a medicine is an expensive and inefficient road to nowhere [2].

"A major advantage of the Parliament's position is that results about a medicine's efficiency would be made public. This will mean decision-makers are going to be held accountable.

"One downside coming from today's vote is that the Parliament thinks there should be a way to have a less rigorous approach for medicines which treat rare diseases. But these are precisely the drugs which can be the most expensive and which need the most investigation. The standard should be the same for all medicines. Our hope is now that Member States together with Parliament can agree to an approach which will not let too many fish through the net."

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[1] Currently, assessments into a medicine's efficiency are usually carried out by individual national authorities, meaning the work is often replicated in other EU Member States but not necessarily with the same outcomes and at the same time. The objective of the proposal under discussion is to have an assessment made jointly by Member States rather than individually, increasing cooperation between countries, and efficiency and outcomes for patients.

[2] See British Medical Journal study on 'Availability of evidence of benefits on overall survival and quality of life of cancer drugs approved by European Medicines Agency' (2017) and Pharmaphorum on 'Fury as NHS rejects cystic fibrosis drug price offer' (2018).

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