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OMCL Network discusses strategy and reviews past year's activity at annual meeting

The 24th annual meeting of the European Network of Official Medicines Control Laboratories (OMCLs) took place on 13-17 May in London (UK). It was attended by 260 participants from 40 countries, representing 61 OMCLs and national competent authorities, including representatives from the official laboratory at the Medicines and Medical Devices Agency of the Republic of Moldova, which joined the Network as a full member in July 2018. Representatives from Belarus, Canada, Israel, the Russian Federation, Singapore and the Taiwan FDA also attended the event, which was jointly organised by the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), UK.

In a video message, Ian Hudson, chief executive of the MHRA, stressed the long history of collaboration of the UK with the OMCL Network and the EDQM in general and pointed out as an example of successful work sharing the recent valsartan incident, which demonstrated the importance of cooperation between health authorities and OMCLs on an international level. He also reminded the participants about the main mission of the medicines agencies and their control laboratories in Europe: to protect public health.

Opening the event on behalf of the co-organiser, the EDQM Director Susanne Keitel thanked the organisers and participants, mentioning that the OMCL Network was celebrating its 25th anniversary. The work of the Network has evolved over the years from planned market surveillance testing to now include concerted programmes on the detection of falsified and illegal medicines, testing of pharmaceutical preparations produced in community and hospital pharmacies and the quality control of active pharmaceutical ingredients on the European market. In 2018, almost 1300 marketed medicines were tested in the Network under the Mutual Recognition Procedure (MRP), the Decentralised Procedure (DCP) and the centrally authorised products (CAP) programmes, over 26 000 official control authority batch release (OCABR) certificates for human and veterinary vaccines and blood products and nearly 8000 official batch protocol review certificates for veterinary vaccines were granted. In addition, more than 5000 suspected illegal and falsified medicines were tested in the official control laboratories.

The variety of activities was reflected in the programme of the annual meeting, which was organised in 9 sessions.

As well as the key role that OMCLs played in the valsartan incident, focus was given throughout the week to the presentation of "success stories" describing OMCL work in various fields of activity, which underlined the importance of independent laboratory testing and the benefits of collaborating within a large network. The introduction of ISO 17025:2017 in the laboratories of the Network was another important topic discussed from different viewpoints. In the human OCABR session one of the main topics was once again Brexit and

the strategies OMCLs have put in place to deal with the eventual changes in order to ensure a smooth transition.

The 25th annual meeting of the OMCL Network will take place in May 2020 in Oslo and will be organised together with the Norwegian Medicines Agency (NoMA).

Illustrating the role of the OMCLs in protecting public health
An informative brochure and video clip are available describing the role and missions of the OMCLs.

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Note for the Editor: Further information is available on the internet site **https://www.edqm.eu/**
The EDQM is a leading organisation that protects public health by enabling development, supporting implementation, and monitoring the application of quality standards for safe medicines and their safe use. Our standards are recognised as a scientific benchmark worldwide. The European Pharmacopoeia is legally binding in member states[1]. Similarly, the EDQM develops guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ transplantation and consumer health issues.

[1]There are thirty-nine members of the European Pharmacopoeia Commission: *Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of North Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the European Union.*