



## Internet sales of veterinary medicines: How to ensure a legitimate system in place

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Internet sales, virtual shopping and e-banking are a reality nowadays. This applies to a wide range of goods and it is inevitable that, even though it is not yet a common practice for VMPs<sup>1</sup>, it is already becoming so and will definitely increase in the next years.

In recent times, many illegal Internet pharmacies, providing all kinds of human medicines without prescription, have emerged. Even in cases of legally authorized Internet pharmacies, avoiding frauds and ensuring legitimacy is not always easy in practice.

### Internet sales of Antimicrobials<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that medicines are not common marketing consumable goods. This situation poses many risks for the public health. In particular when discussion comes to antimicrobial resistance and ways to prevent it, there is one major question to answer: while we try to diminish the use of antimicrobials in both animals and humans and strictly monitor this, how do we ensure that antimicrobials are not accessible by the end users via other channels, like Internet?

We have to recognize that it is inconsistent to discuss about restraining veterinarians from selling of antimicrobials, while leaving the window open for anyone to easily access the medication they need on-line, even without veterinary examination, diagnosis, veterinary prescription or any other control.

Moreover we have to seriously consider that legal requirements concerning dispensing, characterization of POMs<sup>3</sup> and control of prescriptions are not harmonized in the different countries of the EU. That diverse situation is an additional factor, which leaves space for irresponsible and uncontrollable use of antimicrobials via Internet channels throughout Europe, leading to an increased risk of development of antimicrobial resistance.

For all the above mentioned matters, FVE proposes the **ban of the sales of Antimicrobials on Internet.**

<sup>1</sup> VMPs: Veterinary Medicinal Products

<sup>2</sup> Antimicrobials: A general term for any compound with a direct action on micro-organisms used for treatment or prevention of infections. Antimicrobials are inclusive of anti-bacterials, anti-virals, anti-fungals and anti-protozoals

<sup>3</sup> POMs: Prescription Only Medicines

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### **Internet sales of other - than antimicrobials - VMPs**

FVE recognizes that Internet is a means that is and will be even more used in the future, also for selling of veterinary medicines. For this purpose, European veterinarians are very concerned about the risks that this practice may include and are looking into developing a safe framework that will ensure legitimate sales of VMPs - other than antimicrobials - and minimum or no chance for frauds in veterinary prescriptions and delivering of the right medicine to the right quantity and to the right person.

In order to achieve this FVE proposes that every action to be taken shall be at national and European level. Efforts shall be focused mainly on two directions:

#### 1. Control of Internet pharmacies for certain VMPs

- Authorisations of Internet pharmacies shall be granted exclusively to enterprises where veterinarians and/or pharmacists.
- All Internet pharmacies shall be registered and certified by a national or European logo according to commonly agreed standards.
- Strict control mechanisms shall be foreseen by the European legislation and implemented in all EU Member States.

#### 2. Control of Veterinary Prescriptions

- EU Member States (MS) shall develop a system of digital prescription at National level. EU Commission shall promote the development of a harmonized system across Europe and assist MS in its implementation.
- Delivering and control of prescriptions must be at national level, at least until a European system enabling the control of cross border prescriptions is in place.
- E-submission of prescriptions on a National database, directly linked to all pharmacies (shops and Internet ones), National Competent Authorities and veterinarians can be a good solution. This shall be a technology system which is updated immediately and can easily be controlled by all linked parties. On-line cross checking by the pharmacy and the prescriber will prevent from frauds.
- Strict control mechanisms must be in place, leading to dissuasive penalties or prosecutions in case of illegal activity or failure to act according to the professional Code of Conduct.