

5 June 2020

Dr Otmar Kloiber
Secretary General
World Medical Association, Inc.
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France

By email: secretariat@wma.net

Feedback on proposed WMA Statement in support of Ensuring the Availability, Quality and Safety of All Medicines Worldwide

Dear Otmar,

Thank you for inviting the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) to provide feedback on several proposed statements following the cancellation of the April Council meeting in Porto due to COVID-19. The NZMA, a constituent member of the WMA, is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with more than 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. Our feedback is limited to the statement on the availability of medicines and has been informed by our Board and Advisory Councils.

We support the development of this statement and are in broad agreement with its recommendations. However, while paragraph 9 addresses stockpiling by the pharmaceutical industry, we believe the statement needs another paragraph about the duties and behaviours of individual prescribers and their organisations when it comes to stockpiling of medicines. Stockpiling and hoarding of medicines is unacceptable and affects those populations most vulnerable. We suggest that the statement require doctors to be aware of the need to Choose Wisely¹ and their professional responsibilities which should include, for example, the need to use resources sustainably and equitably, and a duty to balance duty of care to patients with duty of care to the wider population.² The NZMA Code of Ethics contains the following two points that are relevant to this:³

¹ <https://choosingwisely.org.nz/>

² Medical Council of New Zealand. Safe practice in an environment of resource limitation. September 2018. Available from <https://www.mcnz.org.nz/assets/standards/ca25302789/Safe-practice-in-an-environment-of-resource-limitation.pdf>

³ NZMA. Code of Ethics for the New Zealand Medical Profession. 2020. Available from <https://bit.ly/2zI3aob>

While doctors have a primary responsibility to individual patients, they have a concurrent responsibility to all other patients and the community. Doctors therefore have an ethical responsibility to manage available resources equitably and efficiently.

In an environment of resource constraint, priorities need to be assigned to achieve the wisest use of limited resources. Doctors have a duty to work with others in developing rules to set priorities. Doctors also have a duty to abide by such rules, provided the rules conform to ethical principles. The rules should be just, open, valid and reliable.

With respect to paragraph 6 ('tackle the unacceptable loss of opportunity that such drug shortages represent for patients and which fuel the loss of confidence of citizens in the health system'), we suggest that this is more a statement of fact and would be better included in the preamble rather than in the recommendations. We would also appreciate the opportunity to review the references that are cited in the draft statement, and ask whether it may be possible for the WMA to supply these translated into English? Finally, there is a spelling error in the header (this should be 'availability').

We hope that our feedback is helpful and look forward to seeing the next iteration of this statement.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Baddock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair