

WSMI DECLARATION ON SELF-CARE AND SELF-MEDICATION 2006

The WSMI Board declares that

1. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity¹. The healthcare system and healthcare professionals cannot bring about this state of health in the community alone; to achieve this requires the full involvement of individuals looking after themselves through self-care.
2. Self-care includes healthy living behaviours such as avoiding health risks, adequate physical exercise, proper nutrition, maintenance of mental well-being, and taking medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) responsibly and appropriately. Self-care products are useful for individuals wishing to take preventive care and to treat a large number of ailments either under the direct supervision of a healthcare professional or on their own. All of these elements can contribute in a major way to individual wellness and collective public health, underpinned by the support of healthcare professionals.
3. The determinants of good health and the causes of disease are now better understood than ever before and the contribution that can be made by self-care is today well understood and can be put into practice.
4. People have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care². Individuals thus have a *responsibility* towards as well as a right to their own health, and healthcare professionals are well placed to work with them to support and encourage individual health behaviours.
5. With the epidemiological transition from predominance of communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases and disorders, self-care is particularly important. This evolution in disease profile will require healthcare services to reorient away from a focus on providing 'sickness services' and towards prevention and management services. Self-care - including self-medication - will in fact constitute not only the reality but also a fundamental component of future healthcare. In fact, the use of self-care products is already a widely practiced component of self-care.
6. Responsible use of self-care products involves using the right product for the right indication at the right time and in the right way. This includes both self-medication using self-care products for treating common health problems and the use of self-care products to help reduce the risk of disease. Self-care products are especially designed and labeled for use by the consumer and approved as safe and effective for such use. Self-medication is a widely practised component of self-care. The challenge and opportunity for government authorities, healthcare professionals and providers of self-medication products is to have an appropriate framework in place for responsible self-medication.
7. A country which fully encourages self-care can expect to have a healthier population and be able to redeploy scarce resources to priority areas. The opportunity is to develop self-care as a fundamental core asset in health, not just as a support mechanism. Even (and perhaps especially) in the most resource-poor settings, self-care should play a major role.
8. The strong relationship between the health of a country's population and the country's economic performance is now better understood. Investing in health should be seen as an excellent investment, with dividends in the short and long term.

¹ WHO Constitution, first principle (see <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/>)

² Declaration of the Alma-Ata International Conference on Primary Health Care, USSR, 6-12 September 1978