

Dear UK World Health Organisation delegates,

We, the undersigned UK based civil society organisations and patient organisations, strongly oppose the proposals made by the UK Government and several countries at the May 7, 2019 informal on the World Health Assembly (WHA) transparency resolution. The April 29, 2019 version of the resolution, sent to governments by the WHO with ten co-sponsors from Europe, Asia and Africa, was focused on transparency, providing concrete measures to address high drug prices and aimed to help remedy the information asymmetry between governments and pharmaceutical companies when negotiating medicine prices. The resolution, set out an ambitious but practical agenda for making drug prices, research and development (R&D) investments, patent landscapes and clinical trial outcomes progressively more transparent, and access to information more equal.

The 11 brackets to the text suggested by the UK, plus other proposed changes from other member states, would make this resolution significantly weaker.

We are disappointed to see that in the annotated text, the UK Government have pushed for every mention of 'high prices' to be deleted. High and arbitrary priced medicines have become a serious issue for the NHS and other health systems which is denying patients access to medicines. This is highlighted by how the NHS spending on medicines in England has grown from £13 billion in 2010/11 to £17.4 billion in 2016/17 – an average growth of around 5% a year. And after three years of fruitless negotiations between NICE UK and Vertex, it has still not lead to a decision over a reduction on the £104,000 price tag for the cystic fibrosis drug Orkambi.

We are disappointed that the UK government is pushing for the proposed measures to be voluntary on a national level. Tackling high drug prices and reforming the current R&D model, requires unified international coordination from all WHO Member States.

By attempting to delay discussions to next year's Executive Board Meeting, we are concerned that the UK will derail the transparency initiative. This possible outcome would seem contrary to the UK's recent calling for a more informed debate on transparency in relation to the OECD Pharmaceutical Innovation and Access to Medicines report. Supporting the discussion of Italy's resolution at this year's World Health Assembly, would provide an opportunity for the UK Government to show genuine leadership in addressing the access to medicines crisis.

We urge the UK representatives participating in the May 10, 2019 informal consultation to act in the national public interest in this matter and withdraw its amendments and instead support an effective resolution that demands genuine transparency as a practical agenda for tackling high drug prices and the inefficiencies within the current R&D system.

Sincerely,
Global Justice Now
Save The Children UK
UAEM UK

Just Treatment
STOPAIDS