

Access to essential generic medicines can save 10 million lives annually

By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - September 19, 2022 @ 12:08am



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GOING by the World Health Organisation (WHO), "essential medicines are those that satisfy the priority healthcare needs of the population.

"They are selected with due regard to public health relevance, evidence of efficacy and safety, and comparative cost-effectiveness.

"Essential medicines are intended to be available within the context of functioning health systems at all times in adequate amounts, in the appropriate dosage forms, with assured quality and adequate information, and at a price the individual and the community can afford."

The first WHO list of essential drugs was published in 1977 with 205 generic items. At present, there are over 300 items in the list.

The range has increased over the years and now includes, for example, an anti-migraine drug, antidotes and anti-cancer drugs.

In other words, generic drugs are not inferior in any way to branded names.

Access to essential generic medicines (EGD) forms part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is intended to satisfy the healthcare demands of a vast majority of people worldwide. It is the basis of national drug policy in more than 155 developed and developing countries.

Many governments refer to the WHO definition and recommendations when deciding on the list. In fact, countries are encouraged to prepare their own lists, taking into consideration local priorities.

Most countries have an official EGD list. In Malaysia, it is generally known in the public sector as the "blue book", referring to the colour of the volume.

It has been estimated that access to EGD could save 10 million people a year, making the system more equitable.

At the end of the last century, more than 1.7 billion people were deprived of access to EGD. Such problems are still seen in many parts of Asia and Africa even though access to EGD has been declared a fundamental human right.

The implementation of EGD is intended to be flexible and adaptable to many situations. Exactly which generic drugs are regarded as essential remains a national responsibility.

The medicines must be accessible at all times, in sufficient amounts and at affordable prices. Therein are several advantages, such as maximum health benefit with limited resources.

The end users are protected from financial exploitation and misuse of scarce supply.

People receive EGD appropriate to clinical needs, in doses that meet individual requirements, for an adequate period and at the lowest cost to them and their community.

The system also encourages the use of standard treatment protocols globally.

It lowers costs through economies of scale, and simplified systems of procurement, supply and distribution.

Overall, it provides equitable quality of care with optimal health outcomes for the majority.

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