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HIGH-QUALITY DRUGS AT CHEAPER PRICES

The Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. John Munro, recently tabled in the House of Commons a document proposing changes in the drug-quality assurance program which, besides expanding the present operations, will reduce the price of drugs to the public. An additional $2,355,000 a year will be required to meet the cost of the new proposals.

Mr. Munro's statement follows:

...As is well known, the Food and Drug Directorate of my Department has had for many years programs related to drug analysis and inspection. The new program will, however, permit significant expansion of our efforts in these areas. Some information related to drug analysis and costs now is being made available to the health professions on a regular basis by means of the *RX Bulletin*, our drug information journal, published by the Food and Drug Directorate.

The Government of Canada is committed to the objective of reducing drug costs, and Ministers have indicated on numerous occasions the Government's intention to initiate additional programs to attain this objective. The provinces also are deeply interested, since they are large-scale purchasers of drugs for mental hospitals, homes for the aged and public health units. At least some provinces are interested in extending bulk drug purchases to cover general hospitals. The Federal Government as well is a major purchaser of drugs through the Department of National Defence and the Medical Services Branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare.

I am fully aware of the fact that many physicians and pharmacists are reluctant to prescribe and dispense generic or other lower-cost drugs, unless they can be assured that low-cost drugs are of acceptable quality. Any program aimed at reducing drug costs must, therefore, recognize the need to provide objective information on drug-quality to the professions of medicine and pharmacy.

Although retail sales of prescription drugs amounted to over $271 million in 1970, relatively few drugs accounted for the bulk of sales. In one survey, it was found that in 1969 the top 80 drugs accounted for 55 per cent of total sales.

The new monitoring program will enhance our ability to realize the aims and objectives of the four principal elements of our program: analysis, inspection of manufacturing facilities, assessment of efficacy, and publication of results.

ANALYSIS

In the analytical program, each specimen will be analyzed for identity, potency, content uniformity, weight variation, and disintegration time. Most of the analyses will be conducted in the drug-quality monitoring laboratory located in the Toronto Regional Laboratory of the Food and Drug Directorate. This laboratory is being specially set up and equipped to conduct large-scale analyses of drug products, using

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