

In its continuing efforts to increase access to controlled medicines, WHO organized a meeting on assuring availability and accessibility of opioid medicines in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 6 to 8 December 2010. The meeting was held in collaboration with the Moroccan Society of Palliative Care and Management and the African Palliative Care Association.

This important meeting brought together decision-makers and health care professionals from Morocco and global experts in the field to engage in a collaborative effort to improve the precarious situation faced by the Eastern Mediterranean Region in this regard.

The meeting was held to improve the knowledge of participants about the policies, tools and infrastructure necessary to increase availability of and accessibility to opioids, as well as to support the Moroccan delegate in evaluating respective national policies and laws on opioid availability. Discussions aimed at identifying tangible steps towards this aim, including measures to enhance access to controlled medicines in existing Moroccan Ministry of Health policies and action plans.

According to WHO statistics, approximately 80% of the world's population lives in countries with no or very little access to these medicines, the exception being a small number of industrialized countries. This is largely due to the common fear that patients will develop drug dependence during treatment. However, this fear is largely unfounded, as evidence indicates that almost all patients stop their opioid medication at the end of their treatment with no long-lasting effects.

Greater awareness is needed among policy-makers, health professionals and the general public that improved access to pain medication is required urgently and to dispel the myth that opioid analgesics, when used medically, will harm patients or cause dependence.

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