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## Object : **Stopping a reliable source of comparative drug information in the UK will harm patients**

Dear Minister,

The UK Government has decided to stop the distribution of the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin (DTB)* to healthcare professionals funded by the National Health Service (NHS). The International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB) – which represents 76 independent bulletins in 41 countries around the globe – warns that not only will doctors miss the *DTB* as a reliable source of independent comparative information for rational therapeutic choice, but that this step of the UK Department of Health (DoH) will definitely do harm to patients. Furthermore the *DTB* has a good reputation around the globe and many *DTB* articles have been translated by drug bulletins in other countries.

The DoH argues that there are other sources of drug information and quotes among others the British National Formulary, the National Prescribing Centre and the National Electronic Library for Health. These sources may provide useful information but do only complement and can never replace the information *DTB* has to offer. The health sector is flooded with misleading medical promotion, which leads to wrong choices and over-medicalisation. There is a need for more, not less, independent drug information.

It's not only the very existence of *DTB* which is at stake but also that of "Treatment Notes" a rather unique type of patient information which is also produced by *DTB*. The decision to stop the funding of *DTB* only when the latest contract has ended meant that the bulletin had virtually no opportunity to switch over to a subscription-based model.

The claim by the DoH that *DTB* is a "commercial publication" is outrageous and misleading. It is difficult to believe that the DoH cannot distinguish between commercial and independent information.

The DoH is ill-advised in believing that cutting off *DTB* would save the NHS money. The savings will be surpassed by a quickly rising prescription bill.

It is the duty of each public health system in the world to ensure that prescribers and patients alike have easy access to independent information on medicines. The UK Government would be misguided in cutting off scientifically sound information sources and leaving therapeutic choices even more to the market forces. The ISDB strongly recommends that the UK Government rethinks its decisions for the benefit of patients and health professionals worldwide.

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