

PRESS RELEASE 2011-06-16

New Swedish institute to promote free access to reliable information about medicines

Despite constant information overload, there is a surprising lack of readily available and reliable information about medicines, in Sweden, as well as globally. Drug industry, pharmacies, health care institutions, authorities, and sources on the internet - they do all provide information in different ways, with varying degrees of clarity and objectivity. It is difficult to tell facts from fiction and advertising! The newly established "Swedish Institute for Drug Informatics" promotes free access to evidence based and objective information about medicines; their use, benefit and risks, for health care, academy and the general public, nationally and globally. The Institute will use open protocols and support the development of and open access to clever and simple IT tools!

The use of medicines is increasing all over the world, and the global drug expenditure is now approximately 800 billion Euros yearly. Add the costs for misuse of medicines, which amounts to at least as much! Access to unbiased, readily available and well structured drug information is a prerequisite for all forms of safe and effective drug treatment. This is as true in a rural African health centre, as in a Swedish university hospital.

A patient needs an antibiotic to treat an infection. Which drug is most effective? Is this drug available locally? Under what brand names are the drug sold? Can this antibiotic be used together with other drugs? What dose is suitable for my patient? What side-effects are to be expected? These questions arise daily to patients and health care providers all over world.

- Today, there is a huge amount of information about drugs available to both patients and health care workers. However, it is nearly impossible to sort out what is reliable information, says Lars L Gustafsson, professor of clinical pharmacology. We believe that clever IT tools can help both the general public and health care workers to keep correct information at hand.

- In poor countries, the cost for medicines represents 40-60 percent of the total health care expenditure. Health care providers are often at loss, even concerning the most basic drug information. The access to correct information can make a difference between life and death in this context, says Anders Wijkman.

The Institute is based on a broad experience in the area of drug information and information technology. SIDI has been founded by Paul Cohen and Lars L Gustafsson, both of which have worked within the area for many years. Together with the other board members, they represent a life-long commitment to questions concerning drug treatment and health care, development of information technology, social sciences, politics, research and industry.

Board:

- Professor Lars L Gustafsson, M.D., Clinical Pharmacology, Karolinska University Hospital and the Department of Laboratory Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, chairman.
- Associate professor Ylva Böttiger, M.D., Clinical Pharmacology, Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm.

- Professor emeritus Björn Pehrson, Telecommunications Systems Laboratory, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.
- Computer scientist Daniel Rodriguez, Seibo-Studios, Stockholm
- Former EU parliamentarian Anders Wijkman, Stockholm

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