

India raise concern over WHO's failure to replace IMPACT with working group on counterfeit drugs

Joseph Alexander, New Delhi

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India has raised strong concern over the delay in setting up a working group by the World Health Organisation to address the problems of counterfeit and substandard medicines and adopt changes in the policy, instead of leaving the task with controversial International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT).

India took up the matter with the WHO recently after the world agency failed to even set up the working group. The decision to set up working group was taken following sharp criticism from members led by India and Brazil over the activities of the IMPACT. The group is supposed to report back to the member countries sometime in April. Though a meeting was slated in December to form the panel, it did not take place.

At the last World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2010, it was decided to create a "time-limited and results-oriented working group on substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/falsified/counterfeit medical products comprised of and open to all member states." However, with no serious efforts still on this front, the WHO has come in for flaks from many members led by India.

India said the working group was supposed to look into even the IMPACT housed within WHO. "The intellectual property rights were at the heart of IMPACT but were not in the mandate of WHO. IP rights are diverting WHO from its mission of global public health," according to the Indian delegate. India also asked that the work of IMPACT be suspended for the moment until the working group could evaluate its work.

India also expressed concerns about the recently completed plurilateral Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, its possible impact on the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Countries like Brazil strongly supported India's intervention to express concerns on the lacklustre approach on the working group while United States still strongly supported IMPACT, according to the information reaching here.