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Pictogram Program to Help Make It Simpler, Safer to Take Medicine
CHEO and FIP Make Free Software Available to Pharmacies and Hospitals

OTTAWA – If a picture is worth a thousand words then the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) are helping deliver the next chapter in the book on health literacy. Today, the two organizations announced the availability of their pictogram software, free-of-charge, to hospitals and pharmacies across North America and Europe.

The software uses pictograms to tell a story through simple and descriptive images that graphically convey instructions to patients on how medicine should be safely taken.

Studies have proven that literacy, education, language and culture all impact communications between a doctor and patient – and a patient's ability to recover. According to UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, about 26% of the world's adult population are illiterate. Understanding health information, such as instructions for medications, can be difficult -- and can affect a patient's health.

To help resolve this problem, Dr. Régis Vaillancourt, CHEO's Director of Pharmacy, led a FIP-funded initiative to develop a series of pictograms. Pharmacies and hospitals can now download the free software and provide patients with simple, cartoon-like, images which explain how a medication should be taken, when it should be taken, and under what circumstances.

“This is all about health literacy -- the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions,” said Vaillancourt. “We need to make it safer and easier for people all over the world, including right here in Canada, to take medicine. Language, education, age and even culture may impact how people interpret medical instructions. With something this critical, it is important to help reduce the possibility of mistakes.”

After designing the pictograms and testing them in-field with people from different cultures, they were embedded into a software program that pharmacists can easily download and give to patients with their prescription. The software was designed by Lieutenant Commander Sylvain Grenier, a pharmacist from the Canadian Department of National Defence who also works at CHEO to maintain his critical care skills.

The Pictogram Project has been a long-standing initiative of the Military and Emergency Pharmacy Section of FIP. It is a prime example of the Federation's mission to improve global health by advancing pharmacy practice and science to better enable discovery, development, access to, and safe use of, appropriate, cost-effective, quality medicines

worldwide. FIP is proud to support the Pictogram project and hopes that the software is used to its fullest potential where most needed.

Pharmacists can get the pictogram software and more information, including instructions and a tutorial video, by visiting:

http://www.fip.org/www/index.php?page=pp_sect_maepsm_pictogram

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For more information:

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For more information on FIP, its activities and becoming a Member, please visit:

www.fip.org