Press release
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METHADONE TREATMENT NOW AVAILABLE AT COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

ICAD initiative launched on November 1st, bringing treatment closer to patients and promoting continuity of care.

The Programme for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence with Methadone Hydrochloride in Community Pharmacies is being launched this November in the municipalities of Albufeira, Loulé, Portalegre, Portimão, São Brás de Alportel, Santiago do Cacém and Vila do Bispo, with a gradual rollout across the country.

The initiative is promoted by the Institute for Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies (ICAD), the National Authority of Medicines and Health Products (INFARMED), the National Association of Pharmacies (ANF), Association of Pharmacies of Portugal (AFP) and the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society.

This service enables people enrolled in opioid dependence treatment programmes to receive methadone at participating community pharmacies, following referral and in coordination with the teams responsible for their clinical follow-up.

Making this service available in the communities where people live facilitates access, reduces the need to travel and helps improve treatment adherence. The relationship of trust established with pharmacy teams also ensures that methadone can be administered in a private setting, safeguarding each person's privacy, confidentiality and dignity.

«The scale of this reality confirms the importance of developing increasingly accessible responses: in 2024, approximately 24,100 people received treatment for drug-related problems through the public outpatient treatment network, with heroin identified as the main substance used in more than 13,200 cases. Collaboration with pharmacies will help expand treatment capacity and support recovery and social reintegration pathways», says Joana Teixeira, President of ICAD.

«Addiction requires qualified, compassionate and person-centred responses. Community pharmacies have been involved in various initiatives to prevent and tackle addiction and enjoy the trust of local communities. The possibility of receiving treatment at a pharmacy, with privacy and

confidentiality, can help reduce stigma and make a tangible difference to continuity of care», says Ema Paulino, President of the ANF.

According to the President of INFARMED's Board of Directors, the programme represents an «important step» towards strengthening access to healthcare and bringing services closer to citizens' needs. «INFARMED is supporting this initiative by providing, within the scope of its responsibilities, regulatory oversight and supervision of the conditions under which methadone hydrochloride is dispensed in community pharmacies, with particular attention to safety, traceability and compliance with applicable legal requirements. This collaboration reflects the commitment of all the organisations involved to ensuring a safe, qualified and person-centred public health response», stresses Rui Santos Ivo.

The pharmacists involved have received specific training to ensure that methadone is administered safely. Prescribing and clinical supervision remain the responsibility of specialised services, with which pharmacies maintain ongoing coordination. The President of the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society also emphasises this point. «Supervised methadone administration in community pharmacies requires preparation, rigour and discretion. Pharmacists are prepared to take on this responsibility, working closely with clinical teams to ensure safe, compassionate and person-centred care, while respecting each individual's dignity, privacy and autonomy», stressed Hélder Mota Filipe.

The programme stems from a Collaboration Protocol signed by the organisations involved, which established the framework for the resumption of methadone dispensing and administration in community pharmacies. The initiative contributes to the objectives of the National Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies 2030 by facilitating access to treatment and promoting recovery and social reintegration.

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