

**Management of steroid that threatens the health of the Thai population**

The 7<sup>th</sup> National Health Assembly,  
Having considered the report on "Management of steroid that threatens the health of the Thai population"<sup>1</sup>,

*Noting* that steroid is medically very useful for, among others, relief of allergy or serious inflammation and for treatment of disorders caused by abnormal immunity, that it is commercially available in many forms, oral, injectable, and transdermal, but its use may lead to serious health hazards and, therefore, needs to come under the physician's supervision, that steroid abuse is commonly seen in the "corticosteroid" group, especially dexamethasone and prednisolone available in diverse forms such as polypharmacy or as an ingredient of a bolus, herbal medicine, health drink or cosmetic, together with propaganda or direct selling approaches, resulting in a large number of people in every region of the country consuming steroid without being fully aware of its consequences, while many suffer from serious health problems and need to seek treatment from the hospital for various ailments, such as stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal bleeding, osteoporosis, suppressed immunity, and serious infection, and that to reduce or stop its use immediately may result in withdrawal symptoms, low blood pressure, loss of consciousness or mental disorders,

*Concerned* that steroid misuse/abuse has led a large number of people in every region of the country to consume steroid without being fully aware of the consequences and to use it inappropriately as they do not know much about its toxicity and that there has been a lot of propaganda and widespread use of steroid in the form of polypharmacy, herbal medicine without pharmacopoeia serial numbers, and other products,

*Worried* that the public will be exposed to health hazards as a result of steroid use without being fully aware of the consequences or as a result of continuous and long use of products containing steroid,

*Aware* of the need to have in place sustainable measures to prevent and solve problems caused by steroid use, integrating the work of all sectors concerned to prevent and suppress steroid use without indication, as well as screening and treating patients unknowingly facing steroid hazards and modifying the drug use habit of the public in such a way that they can use drugs in a reasonable manner and do not use steroid without medical indication,

*Aware* that the laws concerned currently have not been effectively enforced and are outdated,

*Seeing* that every sector plays an important role in improving the situation, i.e. the public sector, professional organizations, law enforcement agencies, health service units, the business and industrial sector, media, the people sector, and civil society,

Has, therefore, passed the following resolutions:

1. Request the Ministry of Public Health to set up a national committee to handle steroid problems, comprising elements from the agencies concerned and the people sector, to coordinate, set policy, measures, and laws, follow-up and assess the steroid problem management in a continuous and concrete manner,

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2. Request the Ministry of Commerce, through the Department of Foreign Trade, together with the Food and Drug Administration, Ministry of Public Health, and Customs Department, Ministry of Finance, to develop laws whereby steroid (both as raw material and as finished product) requires import and export permission from the Ministry of Commerce under the Export and Import of Goods Act B.E. 2522 (1979), thus exercising strict control over the release of steroid at customs checkpoint and imposing harsher civil and criminal punishments on the offenders.

3. Request the Customs Department in conjunction with the Food and Drug Administration to develop a joint action plan to set measures and indicators to ensure greater efficiency in the inspection and monitoring of smuggled imported steroids that may come in various guises, such as bringing with them in person and not declaring them in the invoices.

4. Request the Food and Drug Administration:

4.1 To accelerate the development of regulation secondary to ministerial regulations concerned to restrict distribution channels, the quantity of manufacturing, import and sale of steroid (as raw material and finished products) and review the pharmacopoeia for steroid, including its characters, forms or symbols, including revoking the pharmacopoeia for betamethasone tablets, designed to facilitate drug proper use as may be needed.

4.2 To issue regulation requiring those who are authorized to manufacture, import and sell drugs to report the manufacturing, importation and sale of steroid (as raw material and finished products).

4.3 To work together with the Customs Department, provincial public health offices, manufacturers, importers and sellers of modern medicine, and private associations concerned to develop the management of database for steroid distribution to ensure the interconnectivity and updating of information and reverse engineering ranging from importing raw material, to manufacturing finished drugs to selling at distribution points, e.g. drug stores and health establishments.

4.4 To act as the lead agency to develop a system to report and assess the measures used in steroid management in the country as a whole on a regular basis, including developing the information system, study and research in support of the required reporting procedure, cooperating with the people sector, and disseminating the report to the public on a regular basis.

4.5 To work with the Department of Medical Sciences, provincial public health offices, and health establishments in the development of an efficient system to report undesirable symptoms from steroid use and other health products containing steroid, collecting, analyzing, and searching information in order to assess the situation as a whole and form a basis for planning and problem solving.

4.6 To serve as center for steroid problem management, disseminating information on steroid-adulterated health products, their advertisement and sale promotion, including illegal health products, and receiving complaints and information on leads and inappropriate steroid distribution or adulteration in health products.

5. Request the Pharmacy Council and other professional councils to conduct campaigns and disseminate information on steroid drug problems in an attempt to see an enhanced participation of professionals in the prevention and solution of the problem, as well as to supervise and take strict ethical action against professionals involved in the steroid offense.

6. Request the Ministry of Public Health to conduct campaigns and disseminate information on steroid drug problems and the laws concerned to the operators of health

establishments, drug operators, village health volunteers, and the public at large in an attempt to increase awareness on the dangers of steroid use.

7. Request the Ministry of Public Health to coordinate with agencies concerned in accelerating the production of testing kits for steroid adulteration and make them commercially available to agencies and the public as widely as possible at an appropriate price.

8. Request the Food and Drug Administration, together with the Department for Development of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, provincial public health offices, and religious organizations concerned, e.g. National Office for Buddhism, provincial offices for Buddhism, and Sheikhu Islam Office, to work with networks of religious leaders in an effort to provide greater knowledge and understanding about the laws on the manufacturing, sale and use of drugs, including danger from steroid use to ensure greater legal compliance and practice.

9. Request the Royal Thai Police, through the Consumer Protection Police Bureau, in conjunction with the Food and Drug Administration, provincial public health offices, to develop a joint plan integrating their activities to prevent, monitor, and suppress those involved in the violation of the law or steroid adulteration, so that they can conduct inquiry, in-depth investigation, and strict law enforcement over all the risk areas of the distribution of drugs and health products.

10. Request Complaint Centers, the people sector's consumer protection networks, and village health volunteers, together with local government organizations, health and agriculture personnel and agencies, to serve as local mechanisms for monitoring and managing steroid problems and informing officials concerned to take further necessary action.

11. Request the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Interior, and National Health Security Office to put in place a policy and provide necessary support for the work, including material and budget, of local agencies and networks, e.g. local health security offices, to take action on steroid problem management leading to a higher level of local monitoring and management and promoting the dissemination of correct knowledge about steroid.

12. Request the Ministry of Public Health and the National Health Security Office, in cooperation with professional councils, health establishments of the public and private sectors, and other organizations concerned with drug operators, to do the following:

12.1 To work with the people sector in the development of a system for the search, care, screening, and referral of patients with steroid problems.

12.2 To develop the capabilities of village health volunteers and health personnel in the search, screening, and care of patients with steroid affliction.

13. Request operators of drugs and health products, operators of health establishments, and associations, clubs, and networks related to such operations (health establishments, manufacturers, drug sellers and importers) to do the following:

13.1 To campaign and seek cooperation from their members to comply with the laws.

13.2 To cooperate in the reporting and investigation of the causes by which patients are exposed to steroid danger and have the result sent to the Food and Drug Administration and/or provincial public health offices.

14. Request the Ministry of Education together with the Ministry of Public Health to include in the curriculums at every level the danger of steroid use and the current steroid situation.

15. Request the Ministry of Public Health to issue a directive for operators of health establishment and the State's health establishments to report the sale, distribution and use of steroid and to impose penalties for those who do not do so or who act in violation of the laws on steroid use.

16. Request the Secretary-General of the National Health Commission to make a progress report to the 9<sup>th</sup> National Health Assembly.