

## PHARMACY IN LATVIA

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Leons Balodis-Patricia Tourist Office.Riga Latvia ©

**I**magine how you would you feel if you were told that the way the pharmacy had been operating is no longer acceptable? On 21 August 1991, Latvia declared independence from the former USSR. At that moment, life changed for everyone in Latvia. The reality of this sudden change caused much upheaval. The healthcare sector quickly mobilized to regain its composure and has been working to improve health care throughout Latvia. The Latvian Pharmaceutical Society has been an influential factor in the reformation process and is tirelessly promoting the pharmacy profession to the State and the media.

### The reformation process

As children learn to walk, they will often struggle to stand up and will fall down once they have risen, but eventually the child learns to walk and even to run. A similar transition applies to young organizations such as the Latvian Healthcare system. The reforms began quickly thanks to the Latvian Physicians Association (now known as the Latvian Medical Association), who were one of the main initiators of the reform process. Their goal was to improve health care by shifting resources to the primary care sector and changing the previous financial structure.

Reform of pharmacy officially began in 1993, with the adoption of a law entitled “On Pharmaceutical Activity” (it was later revised several times). This law outlines the responsibilities of the bodies governing pharmacy through the Ministry of Welfare (now known as the Ministry of Health). At present the community pharmacies in Latvia are private. Ownership of pharmacies is restricted to pharmacists. However, there is a limit to the number of pharmacies a pharmacist can own. The previous limit was based on the number of inhabitants in a certain area. Recent legislation has changed this rule and pharmacists will have until 2010 to adapt to the new ‘one store per pharmacist’ policy. The main impact of this reform will be to cause pharmacy chains to disappear in Latvia.

### The Pharmaceutical Society

In 1994, the Latvian Pharmaceutical Society was established. This is a completely new organization that is entirely different from the previous pharmaceutical societies that existed under the former regimes. The main legislating body of the Society is called the Congress. The managing authorities have a President and a Board. They have a key role in organising very important educational events such as seminars and conferences. These Society sponsored events are open to members as

well as to Latvian pharmacy professionals in general. The sessions often are a prime source of information about the latest news in pharmacy. The Society also represents the professional opinion of the pharmacy profession to the State institutions and the media. Since 1994, the Society has gained respect and prestige, allowing for the State to delegate to the Society several significant functions. One of the main responsibilities of the Society is the certification of pharmacists. Other services the Society provides are creating and maintaining the Register of Pharmacists and Pharmacist’s Assistants, and new this year the evaluation of the quality of pharmaceutical care in pharmacies. Currently, the Latvian Pharmaceutical Society is the only professional pharmacist’s organization in Latvia. A Hospital Pharmacists group has recently been set up.

### Regulating bodies

The State Agency of Medicine (SAM) and the State Pharmaceutical Inspectorate were created in 1996. SAM’s main functions and responsibilities are to compile information on topics relating to drugs and pharmaceutical products, quality control, comprise and update the Drug Register of Latvia, evaluate and certify drug and pharmaceutical products, issuing, import, export, transit, and the distribution

## Latvia: a snapshot

Area: 65 000 km<sup>2</sup>  
 Population: 2.3 million  
 Life expectancy: Male 66,  
 Female 77

Leading cause of death: cardio-vascular disease

Cancer is the second cause of death. The incidence of cervical cancer is triple the EU average.

Latvia has similar problems to other European countries; the increasing use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol brings associated comorbidities.

of licences for drugs and pharmaceutical products, as well as for investigational medication. The State Pharmaceutical Inspection is in charge of controlling the pharmacies, manufacturers, and wholesale companies. In 1998, a new agency was created called the Medicines Pricing and Reimbursement Agency. This agency was created to reform drug reimbursement and to bring it into line with European Commission directives. Currently, they are working to maintain an adequate supply of pharmaceuticals for both individuals and hospitals, restricted due to limited financial resources.

Latvian pharmacists have become well trained in pharmacy administrative management. One of the biggest challenges that Latvian pharmacists deal with on a daily basis is to be able to continue to provide

their invaluable services, while dealing with limited resources due to the reimbursement system.

## Pharmacy education in Latvia

There are two pharmacy schools in Latvia. One is located in Riga, the University of Stradins (the former Latvian Medical Academy). The University of Stradins offers a 5-year program and upon graduation students receive a diploma as a Pharmacist. The second university is the Latvian University, where the program consists of two stages: three years of Bachelor studies and two of Master studies. Only those with a Master's diploma are allowed to work in pharmacies. Another option for students is to train as a Pharmacist's Assistant. Riga First Medical College offers a course, which does not have degree status.

Over the past 15 years, Latvian pharmacy has had to undergo a complete transformation. This change has been exciting and frustrating at times. The reform of the healthcare system has created some new governing bodies. The relatively new Latvian Pharmaceutical Society is striving to provide pharmacists with ample opportunities to expand their professional growth, through seminars and conferences. The Society is also dedicated to working with the State to promote positive changes in the pharmacy profession and throughout the healthcare system. In the coming years there will be other challenges to be met. The Society will work with the next generation of pharmacists, providing them with a solid base to continue the development of the pharmacy profession in Latvia.

## Increasing integration into a global society

Emerging from its former isolation, Latvia is forging links with several organizations, the EAHP obviously being one of them. In 2006, Riga will host the 13th congress of the European Association of Museums of the History of Medical Science (EAMHMS), which will include posters, and for the first time experts will be invited to present lectures.



⇒ Riga, Latvia's capital city

The 14th Annual Meeting of the WHO EuroPharm Forum took place in October 2005, in Riga. Fifty four delegates from 25 countries participated in the meeting to assess the work of the past year, plan future activities and decide issues of policy. The meeting was opened by the Minister of Health of Latvia, followed by the WHO Representatives from Latvia and Copenhagen. The meeting consisted of a business general assembly and a professional session comprising a section on networking and data exchange across borders and interactive presentations from France and Latvia about the development of the pharmacy practice in their respective countries.

The publicly quoted company Grindeks, based in Riga, Latvia, is the largest pharmaceutical company in the Baltic countries. Grindeks, a developer, manufacturer and marketer of pharmaceuticals, was established in 1991, yet its real history dates back to 1946. Since 1997, the Company has operated in the private sector. It manufactures world quality products as well as providing services to the world pharmaceutical industry.

