

Ensuring responsible use of medicines in Portugal for almost 40 years

The Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society has been a member organisation of FIP since 1994. In this article Aurora Simón, technical director, and Ana Paula Mendes, pharmacist, from its drug information centre describe the centre's activities to support pharmacy practice and patient safety.

The *Centro de Informação do Medicamento* (CIM) is the drug information centre of the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society (PPS). CIM began its activities 36 years ago and was the first drug information centre developed in a professional organisation in Portugal.

CIM was created with the purpose of facilitating pharmacists' technical and scientific performance, at a time when their role in community pharmacy was evolving through greater activity in giving patient advice, as well as in the hospital setting, where pharmacists were becoming directly involved in patient care, supporting clinicians through clinical pharmacy activities.

In the past four decades, health care in Portugal has evolved and so have the expectations of patients. As a result of therapeutic advances and the growing demand for quality information to support the safe and effective use of medicines, it has been challenging for CIM to continue to fulfil pharmacists' expectations and needs and, through them, those of their patients.

The centre's aim is to provide Portuguese pharmacists with trustworthy and up-to-date information about medicines, pharmacotherapy and professional practice, facilitating and improving pharmacists' daily practice and patient care, thus promoting the safe and responsible use of medicines. CIM also tries to contribute to pharmacists' continuing education as described later.

CIM has its own library, custom-made databases and information retrieval systems. All activities are executed according to standard operational procedures described in the centre's Procedures Manual.

Passive information

One of CIM's most important activities is "passive information", which means answering requests for drug information. Since CIM was established and until August 2020, it has received 45,765 requests. These requests mainly come from community or hospital pharmacists, but they also come from pharmacists working in other areas, pharmacy students and other healthcare professionals.

The requests cover many different subjects, but the main categories (consistent over the years) include the identification of foreign medicines, therapeutic use, dosage and comparative efficacy, adverse reactions, interactions and contraindications. Despite an increase in the complexity of requests in recent years, CIM has been able to respond within 24 hours to over 80% of them, and to provide bibliographic support to about half of all requests.

Answering drug information requests requires thorough research and adequate interpretations of the available evidence, so that the answer is reliable and able to help pharmacists effectively manage patients' daily questions. CIM tries to customise the information provided according to the requesters' profile. This is the centre's most visible and time-consuming task.

Active information

CIM has also developed numerous active information activities. These consist of producing a drug information bulletin, and the preparation of articles and other written content described later. We anticipate questions and produce timely resources that enable pharmacists to optimise their performance with increasing autonomy. >>

In recent years, CIM has developed its own area in the PPS website, which facilitates access to the most recent publications produced by the centre and other useful tools, such as article summaries or a compilation of information resources. We believe that providing direct, immediate and free access to such reliable content is also beneficial to pharmacists living in other Portuguese-speaking countries (www.ordemfarmaceuticos.pt/cim).

CIM has produced a bulletin — *Boletim do CIM* — uninterruptedly since 1986. Nowadays it is published quarterly on the PPS website. The bulletin includes articles on pharmacotherapy and professional practice with topics and authors selected by an editorial board, whose members also review the published articles.

Between 1994 and 2015, CIM published *Ficha Técnica*, which was a feature of the PPS's journal. This was superseded by a new publication — *e-Publicação* — covering the same purpose as previously, in providing practical information to support pharmacists' interventions.

CIM also maintains other sections on the PPS website:

- *Atualidade terapêutica* (therapeutic updates) — brief overview of recently published articles and documents, considered to be relevant, with hyperlinks to access full contents, weekly updated. (CIM has also developed a subsection to focus on articles concerning COVID-19 — *Atualidade COVID*.)
- *Breves Questões Terapêuticas* (brief therapeutic questions) — initiated in 2019, consists of a concise answer to a specific question, and it has been well accepted by pharmacists.
- *Recursos de Informação* (information resources) — compilation of drug information resources and search tools freely available online to support and promote autonomous information retrieval.

In recent years, CIM has organised meetings that consist of oral presentations based on articles published in its bulletin, allowing for interaction between pharmacists interested in the topics. The PPS website stores materials from previously held presentations, acting as an archive. Due to the pandemic situation, these meetings have become online events, facilitated through an interactive platform.



The CIM team (left to right): Ana Mendes (pharmacist), Aurora Simón (pharmacist and technical director) and Fernanda Silva (administrative assistant)

The development of the CIM section on the PPS website has increased the visibility of the centre and the activities that are being developed. The inclusion of information in the PPS newsletter about recent publications and upcoming activities, and highlights published on the website and on social networks, have also been valuable. The use of social media to promote CIM's activities has been a very important tool and has allowed for a more accurate perception of the preferences of our users.

Other educational activities

Since its early days, CIM has been collaborating with academia through lectures about drug information, receiving visits from students or providing them with short periods of training in the drug information field. CIM also participates in educational activities promoted by students, collaborating in the annual Patient Advice Contest, organised by the Portuguese Association of Pharmacy Students. CIM tries to improve search skills and the development of information management skills by students. With this same purpose, CIM has welcomed short visits from pharmacists from Portuguese-speaking countries.

Pharmacy students get in contact with CIM throughout their courses, but especially during pre-graduate internships, requesting bibliographic support for their projects and reports, as well as for practical questions with which they are faced during the internship period. CIM is sometimes the first point of contact between future pharmacists and their professional association.

Over the years CIM has provided short internships in drug information, as well as seminars, mainly for hospital pharmacists.

Further activities and projects

As a drug information centre within a professional organisation, CIM also responds to internal information requests and provides technical and scientific support to projects and activities developed by the PPS board and elected officials. It has been engaged in the development and review of Good Pharmacy Practices and Professional Standards, as well as in the preparation of documents about medicines and health care aimed at the public. CIM has also been requested to participate in the quality control of passive information activities within hospital pharmacy services. The centre has regularly produced several articles and poster presentations about the activities developed, its own performance, and themes related to medicines information.

CIM's activities have been evolving with the development of new, easily accessible publications and the promotion of new events and resources, while it continues to maintain and improve the activities that existed since its creation. CIM will continue to support Portuguese pharmacists' everyday practice but we hope, also, to be able to help Portuguese-speaking colleagues outside Portugal through our materials.