

# REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

## *Ministry of Finance and Treasury*

### *Office of the Directorate of Merchant Marine Circular No. 70*

#### *Consular and Maritime Affairs*

<b>To:</b> Shipowners/Operators of Panamanian Flag Vessels
<b>Subject:</b> Panama Policy on Technical Matters

Continuing our policy of maintaining the owner/operators of Panamanian flag vessels aware of the policies that this Administration has taken on different technical matters, we hereby list a series of items where Panama has stated its position.

Owners/Operators, Class Societies and Other Recognized Organizations, should contact this office for further information on the following policies:

#### **ILO Matters**

Panama ratified ILO Convention No. 92 in which Article 14 prescribes the requirements for hospital accommodation aboard ship. Paragraph 7 of Article 14 indicates the requirements for an approved medicine chest.

The contents of ship's medicine chest should be as listed in Part II of the latest International Medical Guide for Ships put out by the World Health Organization and is so recommended by Panama.

**Guidance to the International Medical Guides for Ships 3rd edition:  
Interim advice on the best use of the medical chest.**

**Joint Statement of the WHO Collaborating Centres for the Health of Seafarers and the  
International Maritime Health Association**

Diagnosis and treatment of sick and injured onboard is a challenge to seafaring. This has always been true despite recent developments in telemedicine. Where no doctor is on board -as it is the case in most merchant ships- a non-medical person holds the responsibility for medical care. He has to rely on his medical training, written information, and – if appropriate- shore based radiomedical or telemedical advice. This information will help him to make best use of the medical chest and equipment on board. Appropriateness of the information available, adequacy, uniformity and quality of the medical chest and equipment is a key to the safeguard of the seafarer's health at his work-place.

The WHO International Medical Guide for Ships (IMGS) was first published in 1967. The IMGS has widely been used in the maritime world. The second edition, written in 1988 was recently replaced by the third edition in 2007. Immediately after the publication of the current IMGS a discussion on the best use of the tool and on further needs developed among experts from the WHO Collaborating Centres for the Health of Seafarers and the International Maritime Health Association.

During a workshop of the INTERNATIONAL MARITIME HEALTH ASSOCIATION (IMHA) in Athens, Greece, November 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> 2008 the concerns were summarized as follows: *"Flag states that do not have national requirements for the contents of the medical chest have in the past relied on a list that has been provided by WHO in the International Medical Guide for Ships (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1988). This list provided information on the quantities to be carried on board. It is not a formal international instrument but the Guide is noted as a source of information in the non-statutory part of the relevant ILO Convention. Port State Control Inspectors use the IMGS list as the minimum requirement for medical supplies. The medication list is now very out of date and when WHO recently published a new edition of the Guide it included updated lists of recommended medications that were derived from the WHO Essential Medications List and of medical equipment taken from The Inter-agency Emergency Health Kit 2006. While this was a rational approach for the WHO to adopt to ensure that well validated treatments were available it did not take into account the need for remedies for minor ailments at sea – the sort that can impair ability to work without being dangerous, nor did it cover all the medical equipment that was needed in maritime situations. More significantly WHO did not consider that they could specify quantities of medications to be carried as there was a lack of information on use and effectiveness of medications at sea. In the absence of such data WHO considered that quantities should be related to voyage pattern and to political / managerial decisions rather than being stated by WHO. This lack of specification is not causing immediate problems where the flag state of the ship has its own national regulations or guidelines but it has led to great difficulties for maritime pharmacists called on to check and restock medical chests on ships from countries, including many of those with major open ship registries, that have no national lists. Pharmacists cannot continue to work to the outdated list and quantities in the old International Medical Guide, while they have no benchmarks for quantities required from the new one, nor the authority to make consistent decisions on the quantities to supply".*

WHO Collaborating Centres for the Health of Seafarers and IMHA agreed that there are a number of areas where actions are needed. The aim is to produce a knowledge-base to specifying the contents of medical chests and the medical textbook. While this is a long-term approach requiring research efforts it was also agreed upon the need to produce an interim guidance on the medical chest to the current users of the IMGS even in the absence of further evidence.

In this paper the authors – experts from the International Medical Health Association- and the WHO Collaborating Centres for the Health of Seafarers publish recommendations to the medical chest as given in the IMGS 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. This is an interim advice to be available to ship-owners, -masters and maritime pharmacists for use on ships of those flags that do not have national requirements.