



World Health Literacy Month – New initiative urges public to start asking questions

People encouraged ask three questions of their healthcare professional

Dublin, Monday 20th Oct 2008: A new national health literacy campaign, the **MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative**, was launched today to celebrate October as World Health Literacy Month. The Initiative urges patients to ask three questions of their health care professional so they clearly understand their problem and what they should do about it.

The three questions, What is my problem?, What do I need to do? and Why is it important for me to do this? were developed by an international health literacy organisation and have been adopted by the Irish health literacy initiative which is led by healthcare company, Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd (MSD) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Health literacy is a person's ability to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life. With over 50% of the Irish population affected in some way by literacy difficulties, it now appears that this could be impacting on their health. Results of a nationwide survey found that 1 in 5 Irish people are not fully confident that they understand information they receive from their doctor. 43% said they would only sometimes ask for clarification if they did not understand what their doctor said to them.

Speaking at the launch today, Ms. Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, said:

“International research has shown that patients who are better informed about their health have more effective consultations with their health care provider, are better informed about the medicines they are prescribed, are more likely to comply with their medication and as a result have improved health outcomes. We would encourage people to ask these three questions of their doctor with confidence so they are clear about their diagnosis and their treatment options.”

During World Health Literacy Month the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative is also launching a number of tools to improve communications between the public and their health care professional. These include the launch of the first Irish web portal dedicated to the topic of Health Literacy, www.healthliteracy.ie, the distribution of appointment cards and desk calendars to GP surgeries and hospitals promoting the three questions and providing tips to help health care professionals communicate with the public clearly and the launch of **the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009**.

Following the success of the inaugural awards in 2008, the **Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009** will recognise people working in the healthcare arena who are making efforts to ensure their communications with the public are 'crystal clear' and easy to understand. 2009's entrants may apply online at www.healthliteracy.ie and submissions must be received by Friday 30th January 2009.

Commenting on the Initiative Ms Ciara O'Rourke, External Affairs Director, Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd. said:

"Health literacy is more than a literacy issue; it is about patient safety, quality of care and having the knowledge to make informed decisions about your own health. With this joint Initiative MSD and NALA aim to help bridge the communication gap between the patient and the healthcare professional and recognise the excellent work already being done in the healthcare environment. Therefore we encourage anyone working in the healthcare sector who is making strides to communicate clearly with patients to enter this year's Crystal Clear Awards."

The judging panel for the awards is represented by individuals from NALA, the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP), the Irish Practice Nurses Association (IPNA), UCD Business Schools, University College Cork, the Adelaide Hospital Society and Cairde. Media partner to the awards this year is The Irish Medical Times.

For further information on the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative or to enter the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards log onto www.healthliteracy.ie. Entries must be received by **Friday 30th January 2009**.

ENDS

Notes to Editor

www.healthliteracy.ie

This is the **first website resource in Ireland on the topic**, www.healthliteracy.ie. The portal, which goes live today (21st October) and is designed to link academics, public policy makers, healthcare professionals and the public to news and international research on health literacy and will be updated on an ongoing basis. It also contains a news section for the media.

About Merck, Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd.

Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Limited is the Irish subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc., a leading research-based pharmaceutical company that discovers, develops, manufactures and markets a wide range of innovative pharmaceutical products to improve human health. For further information visit www.msd.ie

About the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent member-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland. It is concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. For further information visit www.nala.ie