


# Access to life-saving drugs

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Sir, – Life-saving medicines and drugs are becoming prohibitively expensive, up to a point where this endangers the lives and health of patients.

A lack of transparency around what different countries pay for medicines and the actual cost of researching, developing and manufacturing treatments allows pharmaceutical corporations to charge exorbitant and arbitrary prices. This is a  deal for both patients and the health systems which care for them. In Ireland, high prices have limited patients' access to medicines.

This year, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics reported that the HSE had almost used its entire annual budget for purchasing new drugs after only three months, and last month it was reported that expensive new cancer drugs would be available only for private patients with VHI cover.

At the World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva next week, a resolution aimed at improving transparency in markets for drugs, vaccines and other health-related technologies will be tabled.

If passed, the resolution, which is proposed and supported by 10 countries – including Italy, Spain and Portugal – would make valuable information about prices paid, the cost and price structure of medicines, their quality, safety and effectiveness available for governments. This would significantly strengthen the Irish Government's negotiating position and enhance its ability to obtain more affordable prices for medicines.

Medicines save lives, keep us healthy and alleviate suffering. There is no reason that governments should wish to remain in the dark on pricing, quality, safety or efficacy when negotiating for something as vital as medicines. Neither should the public be refused access to such important information.

Ireland must help put lives over profit and support the transparency resolution at next week's World Health Assembly. – Yours, etc,

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