

# *Cuba Works to Resolve Shortages of Medicines*

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Havana, December 1 (RHC)-- The Cuban Ministry of Public Health (Minsap) and the country's Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industries Group (BioCubaFarma) have undertaken a series of actions to alleviate shortages of medicines in the country since late last year.

At a press conference, senior officials with Minsap and BioCubaFarma said that the shortages were the result of financial limitations the country has had to endure, due in great part to the persisting U.S. blockade policy against the country.

Rita María García Almaguer, Director of Operations and Technology at BioCubaFarma, said that the situation prevented her group from paying suppliers in time to execute the agreed deliveries. This was coupled, she said, with modifications in the forms of payment, an unexpected hike in prices, and shortages in the offer of raw and packaging materials, which complicated the situation even further.

The senior Cuban official pointed to the impact of the blockade on the sector, particularly Cuba's inability to use the U.S. dollar in its foreign transactions, and the fact that it is forced to resort to a third party -- often in distant places like China, India and Europe-- to acquire equipment, spare parts, reagents and other basic supplies, with the subsequent hike in prices and delayed deliveries.

Financing is a top priority among the actions implemented to reverse the deficit of an important group of medicines, said the BioCubaFarma official. She pointed to vital medicines destined to the hospitals, clinics and other prioritized health care programs, including medication for patients in oncology, the maternal and child program, HIV-AIDS and the treatment of chronic diseases, among others.

She explained that of the 801 drugs in the basic drug list this year, 505 are produced by the national pharmaceutical industry and the remaining 296 are imported. She added that a total of 144 Cuban-made natural products are available in the National Health System (SNS).

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