

Impact of the U.S. blockade on pharmaceutical production in Cuba



Dr. Eduardo Martinez Diaz, president of the business group of the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industries of Cuba, BioCubaFarma.

Havana, January 31 (RHC)-- To learn about the national production of medicines at the end of 2021 and the behavior in the month of January, Granma newspaper talked to Dr. Eduardo Martinez Diaz, president of the business group of the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industries of Cuba, BioCubaFarma.

We think that as from June, we could start to see improvements in the overall supply of medicines and other products, especially those of higher priority, such as control cards, the executive stated.

In 2021, the complex situation of shortage of medicines on the island worsened, both the once produced by his entity and those imported by the Ministry of Public Health, a difficulty that persists today, said

Martínez Díaz.

The scenario will continue to be difficult in the first months of this year, we have to say it clearly and not create false expectations, stressed the leader of the business group of the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industries of Cuba (BioCubaFarma).

On several occasions we have explained the causes of this situation. The main one is not having all the raw materials and supplies required for production. Also, some medicines were missing or with low coverage due to equipment breakage; but it is a minor cause, thanks to the great effort of engineers, innovators and rationalizers of our companies and the support of other sectors, he emphasized.

In turn, the inavailability of raw materials is due to several factors, firstly, the lack of the necessary financing to be able to acquire them. To give you an idea, if we had to buy on the international market the products that BioCubaFarma supplies to the National Health System, we would need more than one billion U.S. dollars. However, production in our country is financed with around 160 million, he said.

Half of the funding available last year was used in the development and production of vaccines against COVID-19 and drugs included in the treatment protocol for this disease. We have had to use a significant part of the resources to confront the pandemic, and only 50% of the financing needed to acquire the raw materials for the basic medicines was available, he specified.

Addressing the impact of the U.S. blockade on the Cuban biopharmaceutical industry, he explained, "in the last three months of last year we were able to export vaccines against COVID-19 and other products to several countries; however, due to the financial persecution, including the refusal of several banks to work with Cuba, millions of dollars have been accumulated that could not be collected, causing delays in the payment commitments to suppliers of raw materials, among other damages".

Another objective element that causes this acute shortage of medicines is the worldwide shortage of raw materials for pharmaceutical use, as a consequence of the global health situation, the authority described.

We have a work system for the permanent and detailed follow-up of the situation of each drug, which allows us to know in real time the status of production, the coverage in each province, the situation with each raw material, the status of the contracting, the situation of shipments, etc. This system has a high level of computerization, which helps decision making.

In the context of this complex situation, the phenomenon of the illegal sale of medicines has worsened, which causes irritation in our population and we must solve it with the participation of all, as the country's top management has asked us to do.

He explained that last year, the lack of medicines produced by the Group had a monthly average of 121, out of the 359 that were to be guaranteed to the basic list.

BioCubaFarma supplies the health system with more than 900 drugs, including medicines, vaccines, medical equipment and devices, among others.

The workers of the Cuban biopharmaceutical industry are aware of our responsibility, and we can assure that a great effort is being made to minimize the effects and be able to revert this situation, he said.

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