

The crimson papers #2

The committee

Basics about the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence of the World Health Organization.



think & do tank
www.FAAAT.net

Among the few roles mandated by the international drug control conventions, the World Health Organization (WHO) must carry the task of evaluating substances liable to produce harms or dependence, in order to decide the most accurate level of control to apply.

It is one of the few tasks of WHO, if not the only one, mandated by the drug control treaties.

That labour is handled by a body of independent experts, the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD), responsible for conducting the medical and scientific evaluation of substances provoking dependence, and liable to abuse and to create "ill-effects".

Their scientific reviews result in the issuing of recommendations to the main international legislative body on drug-related questions: the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

No "narcotic drug" or "psychoactive substance" can be placed under or withdrawn from the rules of the international drug control treaties without having received a previous evaluation and abuse liability assessment by the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence of the WHO.

This paper will briefly explore both the role and history of the committee, and sketch the main principles and practices that rule the functioning of this ECDD.

Authors:

GHEHIOUECHE Farid
KRAWITZ Michael
RIBOULET ZEMOULI Kenzi

Paris,
Septembre 2017

FAAAT think & do tank *Editions*
PARIS 75011, 8 RUE DU GÉNÉRAL RENAULT
ISBN 979-10-97087-01-2 / EAN 9791097087012

What does the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence do?

1. The ECDD (Expert Committee on Drug Dependence) of the World Health Organization is the only international body responsible for conducting the scientific and medical evaluation of all dependence-producing plants or substances.
2. The ECDD emits recommendations concerning the level of international control to be applied, under the 1961 or the 1971 international Conventions on drugs, and submits it to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) of the United Nations, the central legislative organ on drugs at international level. → **Read more about the schedules in Crimson Paper #1.**
 - The ECDD is a technical body, aimed at being independent from countries and political pressure.
 - The CND, one of the sub-commissions of the UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), is a legislative body where all countries members of the international conventions gather to vote on the recommendations of the ECDD.
3. Theoretically, no psychoactive substance can be scheduled internationally without first being evaluated by this expert committee. All decisions from the CND to add or withdraw a drug from the schedules needs to be backed by such a recommendation.
4. The review procedure, or abuse liability assessment, consists in a pre-review and a critical review → **Read the Crimson Paper #3 to learn more about the pre & critical review.**
5. Although they have no obligation to follow the ECDD recommendations, the treaties clearly imply that the recommendations shall be followed by the votes of the CND.
6. Outcomes from the ECDD meetings are issued in a report, published by the World Health Organization in its *Technical Report Series* collection.

Where does it comes from?.

7. The name of the committee hasn't changed since 1969, but before that, the committee has existed under various names :
 - **1969:** Expert Committee on Drug Dependence.
 - **1966:** Expert Committee on Dependence-Producing Drugs.
 - **1964:** Expert Committee on Addiction-Producing Drugs.
 - **1950:** Expert Committee on Drugs Liable to Produce Addiction.
 - **1949:** Expert Committee on Habit-Forming Drugs established.
8. Before the second world war, the League of Nations used a so called "Committee of experts in pharmacology". Caught in a struggle between two concurrent ancestors of the WHO (Health League of Nations and the *International Office for Public Health*), that committee was issuing pseudo-scientific reviews of substances and issuing recommendations for the consideration of the League of Nations' General Assembly, to place several substances under control. At that time the schedules were not existing, each new substance required a specific multilateral agreement to be ratified by all countries

individually.

How does it works?

9. The ECDD is composed by independent experts, academics and researchers from all over the planet, following the general rules of procedure of the WHO for the choice of independent experts working groups (*WHO's Regulations on Expert Advisory Panels and Committees*):
 - Each meeting of the ECDD requires a renewal of its members, chosen by the WHO among a list of eminent specialists in medicine, pharmacology, behavioural or biological disciplines, but also members of public health administrations, etc. Mechanisms exist to prevent conflicts of interest.
10. The WHO, under its department of "Essential Medicines and Health Products", convene, prepares, organizes, monitors the meetings of the Experts. The so-called "ECDD Secretariat" is in charge of this work. The Secretariat also compiles data and provides it to the Experts.
11. After years of absence of clear formal procedures, the WHO adopted in 2010 a document titled "Guidelines for the WHO Review of Psychoactive Substances for International Control" that precises the procedures to be followed by the ECDD members to undertake the abuse liability evaluation within a clearer and more precisely defined evidence-based process, centered around matters of public health.
12. The main criterion on which the Experts root their recommendations are:
 - Similarity to substances already placed under control of either the 1961 or 1971 Convention, or both;
 - A plant, substance or pharmaceutical preparation's degree of therapeutic usefulness;
 - Its "extent of abuse" or "degree of likelihood to abuse", or its liability to provoke addiction;
 - Its possible broader impact on public health and on creating social problems.
13. However, previously to the very Experts' review, the process and criterion followed by the Secretariat for the choice and selection of the relevance of data to be presented to the ECDD keeps following an undefined procedure. That can possibly represent an important way of undermining the independence of the work of the ECDD, by impeding them to access part of the collected data.
14. Except from an introductory "open session" in wich duly accredited observers can have short formal exchanges with the Experts, all meetings and deliberations of the ECDD are confidentials, and indeed made public only after a clearing from the hierarchy of the WHO – another possible way of undermining the voice of the Experts.
15. For more detailed information, we recommend the reading of a very complete article published in *Drug and alcohol dependence* (#13, 2013, pp. 175–181) by E. Danenberg, W.K. Scholten *et al.*, precising the history, process and details about the ECDD, as well as the paper *Scheduling in the international drug control system* (TNI-IDPC series No. 25, 2014, C. Hallam, D. Bewley-Taylor and M. Jelsma).

