

Argentina

## Pharmacy tango

**By Sven Siebenand / Dr. Raúl Mascaró is the owner of a pharmacy in General Roca, a town in the Argentinian part of Patagonia. He is also the President of the pharmacists' association in his country. As such, he has close knowledge of the way the land lies for pharmacies in the South American country.**

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**PZ:** Argentina is the eighth-largest country on Earth. It covers metropolitan centres, such as Buenos Aires, and also the legendary Pampas, which are sparsely populated. How is medication supply organized?

**Mascaró:** Even the most remote towns have retail pharmacies. There is a total of 16,000, with more than a million patient contacts a day. Each pharmacy supplies an average of 2550 people. There are more than 1300 hospital pharmacies in addition to the retail pharmacies. This means that the entire population is covered by a reliable and high quality medication supply system. After two decades of a deregulated pharmacy market, drugs may now only be sold in pharmacies as previously. Argentina is thus one of the few countries around the world in which the market has been re-regulated, if you like. This also increases the reliability of drug therapy, if OTC medication may no longer be sold in supermarkets, at kiosks or even in trains or on the street. We pharmacists had a tough fight to convince the legislature of the risks of medication that is sold outside a pharmacy.

**PZ:** So drugs have come back into the retail pharmacies. Are these run by their owners or do chains operate in Argentina?

**Mascaró:** Both variants exist. Owner-managed pharmacies do, however, have a better reputation in society, as they care more about the patient's needs. The chain pharmacies are more like a sales outlet, the patient is a customer, not so much time is taken and contact is less personal. There are, however, also provinces in which pharmacy chains are banned. In other regions, and especially in the large cities such as the capital, Buenos Aires, there are

mostly chains which makes it difficult to run an owner-managed pharmacy successfully in these areas.

**PZ:** Apart from competition from the pharmacy chains, what are the other issues owner-managed pharmacies have to deal with?

**Mascaró:** Pharmacists are currently in a fight again to obtain reasonable compensation for their services. The amount a pharmacy earns for dispensing a drug depends on a percentage of the price of the drug dispensed. It is only in the case of costly medication, such as cytostatic drugs and biologicals, which are anyway not dispensed by all pharmacies, that the pharmacies receive a fixed sum, although this is negligible in relation to the price of the drug. Another problem is the attempt to allow drugs to be sold in other outlets such as supermarkets and drugstores, as previously. In addition, some insurers want to supply patients with medication by post, bypassing the retail pharmacies. Enhancing the reputation of pharmacists with decision makers would help to provide even more and better pharmaceutical services for the entire population.

**PZ:** How do you become a pharmacist in Argentina?

**Mascaró:** It takes about five years to become a pharmacist. There are state and private universities at which you can study pharmacy. A placement in a pharmacy is also mandatory for most of these courses, depending on the curriculum.

**PZ:** Why are you coming to the FIP congress in Düsseldorf?

**Mascaró:** I have already attended a number of FIP congresses. The topics of the presentations and poster sessions are always very interesting, there is always much to discuss with colleagues from other countries and there are always valuable ideas and information to bring back to the colleagues at home. By the way, the congress will be in Buenos Aires next year.

The congress is naturally interesting every year from a professional point of view. Just as Germany is a beautiful country, we also have a lot for you to discover in Argentina. Anyone who wants to see the most beautiful landscapes in the world must also come to my homeland.

Raúl Mascaró