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Programa Remediador: bringing essential drugs to patients and optimising the supply chain in Argentina with GS1 Standards

Abstract

In Argentina, the Programa Remediador is the programme that supplies medication guaranteeing free healthcare coverage to more than 16 million patients. The Programa Remediador not only issues public tenders for the purchase of the drugs it distributes, but has also become the main logistics operator for public health in the country, using GS1 Standards to efficiently manage the programme. The latter was mandated by the National Administration of Drugs, Foods and Medical Devices (ANMAT) Traceability System in 2011.

Programa Remediador

In 2002, Argentina started implementing the Programa Remediador to supply free medications to people with scarce resources and lack of medical coverage.

Since its creation, the Programa Remediador has managed to distribute free drugs monthly to over 7,000 primary healthcare centres all over the country, providing kits composed of a selection of essential medication, covering the needs for 80% of Argentina's primary centres. By guaranteeing the coverage of more than 16 million users of the public health system, Programa Remediador became the most important programme for drug purchasing and distribution in Latin America.

In this capacity, it provides access to 54 essential drugs, which are purchased in bulk by the National Ministry of Health. The drugs contained in the kits reach the pharmacies of primary healthcare centres directly, bypassing municipal and/or provincial intermediate warehouses.

In order to obtain cut-rate products, Programa Remediador manages the specifications and public tenders for each of these drugs. This methodology aims to ensure the visibility and quality of drug supply from procurement to delivery to the primary centres, all the way to dispensing the medication for treatment.

Implementing GS1 Standards to comply with Argentina's National Traceability System

Following the implementation of Argentina's National Traceability System, introduced in 2011 by the National Administration of Drugs, Foods and Medical Technology of Argentina (ANMAT), each drug or device must be marked with an individual and unambiguous identifier in order to track and trace the item all along the distribution chain – from production or import to the patient. The National Traceability System requires all drugs to be identified through the application of an unambiguous code, according to the recommendations of GS1 Standards.

National and international suppliers need to register and, in real time, update the database by registering unambiguous codes assigned to each product as well as the date of each logistic operation to comply with the requirements. There are specific procedures regarding the identification and marking of secondary packaging that suppliers must follow. The secondary packages are colour-coded according to the Anatomic Therapeutic Chemical (ATC) classification, and include a GS1 DataMatrix containing a Global Trade Item Number (GTIN), lot number, expiration date, an internal code assigned by the Programa Remediador as well as a serial number (where applicable).





As part of its successful implementation, Programa Remediar became the logistics operator for all public health programmes supplying pharmaceutical products and medical supplies.

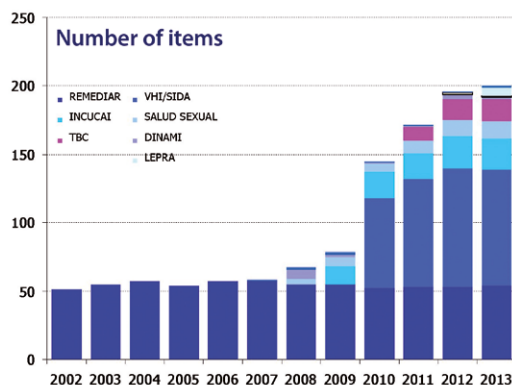


Figure 1: Progress of units distributed by Programa Remediar

Traceability and logistics

The National Administration of Drugs, Foods and Medical Technology of Argentina's (ANMAT's) National Traceability System brought efficiency and visibility to the supply chain, but at the same time represented a challenge for the public health sector. In response to the system's requirements, Programa Remediar had to adapt its processes and IT systems to fully comply with the regulation.

To allow the tracking and tracing of each individual drug, two systems were implemented: the Monitoring System of Healthcare Supplies and the Integrated System of Healthcare Information of Argentina. These two systems were made compatible with the requirements established by the drug traceability system determined by the National Administration of Drugs, Foods and Medical Technology of Argentina.

Programa Remediar also developed a web interface to allow the different health programmes distributed by Argentina's health

agencies (National Aids Agency, Ablation and Transplant National Institute, Sexual Health National Programme, National Agency for Sanitary Emergencies and others) to send online distribution requests to the Programa Remediar, replacing the use of paper, optimising shipments' preparation process and tracing products in real time.

The ultimate goal of these systems is to register the patient's medical consultations, link the information to the lot/batch number of the drug dispensed to patients, and to transfer this information to the drug traceability system established by ANMAT.

The complexity of adapting the existing system required the effort from a multidisciplinary team, with representatives from different departments such as the:

- information systems;
- logistics and drug management unit;
- audit and quality area; and
- tracing and evaluation unit.

Benefits of GS1 Standards: efficiency, safety, speed

The implementation of GS1 Standards enables Programa Remediar to improve efficiencies at each level of the supply chain, including the following:

- Delivery of drugs: supplies are identified and scanned at the unloading dock to reduce errors and verify that the delivery corresponds to the order.
- Drug shipping: Drug delivery labels are scanned to guarantee they are despatched according to their content.
- Information flow: The flow of information is guaranteed whilst efficiently using the human resources.

About the author

Mauricio Monsalvo has worked on the coordination of the Programa Remediar at Argentina's Ministry of Health. Mauricio graduated from the University of Political Science in Morón. He has a Master's degree in Social Research Methodology from the Università di Bologna and a Master's degree in

Epidemiology Public Health at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz/ANLIS).

He has assisted many research projects and publications focused on the safe use of drugs.

