

Dear Minister Bruins,

We have read your open letter to the pharmaceutical industry in the Volkskrant. We are happy to know that you are pleased with the introduction of new medicines and see the valuable contribution the pharmaceutical industry makes. In your letter, you ask for greater cooperation between the government and the private sector, as well as acceptance of their social responsibility to keep healthcare expenditure under control. That is good news, because we want exactly the same thing!

Dear Minister, we hereby put forward our proposal.

Your appeal via an open letter is somewhat surprising, especially since we are already in intensive talks with each other. In June, we agreed to jointly address two specific issues. Firstly, the use of correct facts and figures. The aim is to prevent the circulation of all sorts of unfounded opinions about the healthcare sector that are inconsistent with the facts. Secondly, the functioning of the pharmaceutical industry's ecosystem. Here, the objective is to give transparency about how shareholder returns, the costs of failures, cooperation between governments, companies and knowledge institutions and prices relate to each other to you, the cabinet, Parliament and society. These are valid questions where insight into their complexity helps. A good degree of insight was gained during your recent economic mission with Prime Minister Rutte to Boston. It may be a bit old-fashioned to understand a situation first before passing judgement, but we feel it is the most sensible approach. First the facts, then the solution.

You state in your letter that healthcare costs are rising rapidly. You suggest that this is due to medicines. Of course, that is not the case. Anyone who looks at the figures objectively can see that healthcare costs are mainly rising due to increasing personnel costs and spending on long-term care and social support. In reality, the share of medicines in the total healthcare budget has decreased over the past 10 years from 8.9% to 7.3%. The reasons for this are that we are cautious when it comes to prescribing. Furthermore, we save hundreds of millions of euros in costs each year due to patent expirations and the effect of the Medicines Pricing Act. In addition, your officaries run a very tight ship when it comes to negotiating substantial discounts. As a result, the actual expenditure on medicines is lower than the gross prices suggest. Congratulations!

It stands to reason that spending on medicines in our country is among the lowest in Europe. Our country is therefore not doing that badly at all.

We must also keep in mind that we are helping more and more patients. We are all getting older and a greater number of patients are receiving better and personalised treatment with innovative medicines. The progress in the medical world has been enormous, which is very good news for patients.

The pharmaceutical industry is sometimes an easy target. Our sector cannot participate in the outline agreements and therefore cannot take responsibility for the expenditure on medicines. At the start of this government term, we offered to share responsibility for budget developments in the outline agreements, just as your colleague in Belgium, Maggie de Block, has done. You didn't want to at the time, which is a great shame. A missed opportunity if ever there was one.

Dear Minister, it goes without saying that we are open to further discussions. We won't find solutions by turning our backs on each other. We must work hand in hand with mutual respect and



appreciation for a sector in which more than 65,000 people work day and night to offer patients a new perspective. A sector that invests hundreds of millions in Dutch research into new medicines to fight diseases against which we still often lose the battle. We are working on that and would be pleased to do so together with you. Our proposal is to organise a medical summit between our sector and the government to jointly tackle the issues that concern us both. After all, it takes two to tango!

Aarnoud Overkamp and Gerard Schouw  
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