

Abstract

Over the centuries, maritime healthcare has evolved tremendously. As in so many other areas, valuable lessons can be learned from the past. Numerous medical problems have now been unraveled and addressed, while other challenges are still present.

Today the navigator's chances of survival are a zillion times greater than, say, two centuries ago.

An important role can be assigned to the obligatory medicine chest on board a ship. A modern ship's pharmacy is regulated by the individual flag states. Therefore, notwithstanding the guidelines and the advice of the WHO, the contents of the medicine chest vary from country to country.

In Belgium, the competent authority, in collaboration with Mediport, compiles the list of medical equipment and medicines for the ships.

The use of (prescription) drugs, is often accompanied by unwanted side effects. With regard to driving vehicles, the package leaflet of a medicinal product brings more clarification on this subject. The package insert's guidelines can also be used for navigation, but only as a basis, taking in account the much more stringent standards of sailing skills.

An analysis of various medicines from the Belgian ship's pharmacy shows that there are indeed a large number of medicines that can negatively influence the ability to navigate. In order to be allowed to steer a vessel, the safety of the seaman and his or her environment must be guaranteed. Therefore, recognizing and identifying the above mentioned drugs, is extremely important. By means of a simple color code that classifies the products according to their possible influence on the sailing skills, one can get yet another step closer to optimal maritime healthcare.

In the end, the guarantee of safe passage must be the objective for everyone in the maritime world