WHA 70 WFSA STATEMENT: Agenda Item 13.3 Addressing the global shortage of, and access to, medicines and vaccines

The World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) represents hundreds of thousands of anaesthesiologists in over 140 countries around the world. Two years ago we gave our unequivocal support to Resolution A68/15 on strengthening the provision of safe anaesthesia and essential surgery as a component of universal health coverage.

At that time we highlighted the combined elements of workforce, medications, equipment and infrastructure that ensure the safe provision of anaesthesia. In addressing the global shortages of medicines the WFSA calls upon the World Health Assembly to highlight the anaesthetic medicines essential for safe anaesthesia and therefore safe surgery. Of particular note are ketamine and potent opioids, the availability of which can—and has—been threatened by legislation that ignores their medical value. In Low Income Countries Ketamine provides 70% of anaesthetics and is the “go to” anaesthetic for Caesarean section, essential—life saving—surgery for mothers and babies. Opioids and ketamine are also essential medicines for the management of pain, an indispensable element of appropriate and universal health coverage.

With 134 million surgeries each year, and with millions more surgeries required to address the 30% of the Global Burden of Disease that is amenable to surgical intervention, it is essential that any plan to ensure the manufacture and supply of essential medicines includes essential anaesthetic medicines on its list.

WFSA commends the work of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependency in helping to ensure that the medical value of these medicines translates into sensible policy and legislation. This has been especially important in informing high level—including UN General Assembly—debate on the issue and must continue to ensure that decision makers understand the global health arguments for essential medicines and the often negative effects of legislation on their manufacture, supply and availability.

www.wfsahq.org