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Geneva, 25 December 2013

Subject: Safeguards for Health Domains

On behalf of Health on the Net Foundation I am writing to call your attention to the critical need to ensure appropriate safeguards for the health-related Internet domain names. We recognize the great value to the health marketplace that, collectively, these names could create.

However, at the Health On the Net Foundation (HON), an international NGO, we are concerned about the possibility that ICANN could assign these TLDs without adequate assurances that they will be operated in the interest of global public health.

HON is dedicated to the promotion of transparent and trustworthy health information on the Internet. To achieve this goal, HON offers tools free of charge to the growing online community of healthcare consumers and information providers. One of these tools is the HONcode certification, a proactive way to promote trustworthy health-related websites, which represents 8'000+ health websites in 102 countries. The HONcode certification is a standardized certification verifiable in real time, and it was well established by reaching a consensus among webmasters, citizens and medical experts. HON collaborates with several recognized organizations such as the European Union, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the French National Authority for Health (HAS), the Medical Council Research in South Africa, and the Federal Office of Public Health of Switzerland to achieve HON's vision of providing to people in all countries access to health information which is honest and unbiased, or biases being clearly exposed.

Health information, data, products and services have an important and unique status on the Internet. It is imperative that operators of health domains manage them for and in the public interest. In the context of allocation of the new Internet domain names, the governmental advisory group to the ICANN has proposed a set of generic safeguards for health-related names and stressed that they "may require further targeted safeguards". The safeguards are inadequate for health and do need significant revision. Strengthening them will not only address the concerns of the community, but will also enable providers and businesses to flourish in a safe and assured environment.

We therefore call on the ICANN Board to delay the allocation of .health and other health-related names until adequate safeguards, and baseline conditions for their implementation, are in place. Towards that end, it is essential that ICANN relies on the health community to lead the process to produce a new set of safeguards for health, to be discussed with the ICANN Board at the London ICANN meeting in June, 2014.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Célia Boyer
Executive Director
Health On the Net Foundation