



Media Release

Hepatitis impact in Asia Pacific to rise if not tackled on multiple levels: according to experts

WHO's World Hepatitis Day highlights viral hepatitis as a global health problem

Kuala Lumpur, 27 July 2011 - This World Hepatitis Day, 28 July 2011, a group of leading experts in viral hepatitis is urging governments and the public across Asia Pacific to become more aware of the devastating effects of hepatitis on individuals, their families and the community at large. The group, known as CEVHAP (Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific) was recently formed to address the lack of awareness and political will to tackle issues associated with viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis, particularly Hepatitis B and C, affects one in 12 people worldwide, claiming the lives of approximately one million people every year.¹ Asia Pacific carries the major part of the global burden of viral hepatitis. China and India together have an estimated 123 million people chronically infected with Hepatitis B and 59 million people chronically infected with Hepatitis C, accounting for almost 50 percent of all infections worldwide.^{2,3}

On the local front, there are an estimated 2.5 million Malaysians who are infected with chronic Hepatitis B or C and some 25% of these individuals are at risk of serious liver damage.⁴

“Viral hepatitis is a life-threatening disease, a situation made worse by the fact that a large proportion of those infected do not know that they carry the virus. Awareness of the disease has become a critical issue,” said Professor Dr Rosmawati Mohamed, consultant hepatologist at University of Malaya Medical Centre and an Executive Council Member of CEVHAP.

Compounding the problem, viral hepatitis is mostly a silent disease and many people are also ignorant about how it is transmitted and how it can be fatal if diagnosed at a

late stage,” she added.

The number of people chronically infected with and annually dying as a result of viral hepatitis exceed the prevalence and death due to HIV/AIDS and any cancer. Despite having similar social impact, hepatitis lacks the same level of awareness and political momentum.

CEVHAP’s goal is to act as a bridge between the new WHO Resolution and the Asia Pacific region. Its early focus is on Hepatitis B and C, the two types of hepatitis with the greatest impact in the region.

“While chronic hepatitis is a silent disease with little or no symptoms for many years, it is also a silent disease when it comes to public awareness and government attention. This has led to the situation we find ourselves in today, where a large population with viral hepatitis does not seek medical attention or receive treatment - and this is also true for countries where the treatment is reimbursed by the government,” said Professor D S Chen, Distinguished Chair Professor of the College of Medicine at National Taiwan University and co-founder of CEVHAP.

This is the first year that 28 July will be recognised as World Hepatitis Day globally, as a result of World Health Assembly’s Resolution on Viral Hepatitis (WHA63.R18) of 21 May 2010. The Resolution also expresses concern about the lack of progress in the prevention, control and treatment of viral hepatitis around the world.

“WHO is calling for a global approach to tackle the problem of viral hepatitis and we see that it is our role, as experts in the field, to ensure Asia Pacific is part of, if not leading some elements, of the global approach,” said Professor Stephen Locarnini, Divisional Head, Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory in Melbourne, Australia and co-founder of CEVHAP.

There is urgency within Asia Pacific to implement policies that provide patients access to screening and treatment.

“The burden of Hepatitis B on the health system will continue to rise unless effective public policy interventions are implemented by governments across the region,” said Professor Stephen Locarnini. “We are not saying that nothing has been done - there



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has been progress in countries particularly in the area of universal vaccination - it's just that a lot more *can* and *needs* to be done to effectively tackle this issue.”

About CEVHAP (www.cevhap.org)

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is the first organisation of its kind in the region, established as an independent, multidisciplinary body to advocate for public policy reforms that reduce the burden of viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

Incorporated in October 2010, CEVHAP membership is comprised of many world-renowned hepatitis and virology experts, utilising the collective expertise of its members to assist the region through partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies in public policy formulation and health education.

World Hepatitis Day 2011 in Asia Pacific

World Hepatitis Day across the world will be recognised by thousands of individuals, patient groups, non-governmental organisations and associations, healthcare professionals, governments, and companies. In Asia Pacific, there will be World Hepatitis Day activities in the following countries and regions: Australia; Bangladesh; China; Hong Kong SAR; India; Indonesia; Japan; Malaysia; New Zealand; Pakistan; the Philippines; Singapore; South Korea; Taiwan; and Vietnam.

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¹ World Health Organization. Viral hepatitis: Report by the Secretariat. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB126/B126_15-en.pdf (accessed 30 March, 2010)

² World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/en/>

³ Ferlay et al. Globocan 2002, Cancer incidence, mortality and prevalence worldwide, IARC Press, Lyon 2004

⁴ Malaysian Liver Foundation. 9th Liver Update 2011. <http://www.liver.org.my/liverupdate/main.html>

⁵ World Hepatitis Alliance, Viral Hepatitis: Global Policy. http://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/Libraries/Campaign_Materials/Viral_Hepatitis_Global_Policy.sflb.ashx



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