



For Immediate Release

Hong Kong

27 July 2011

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
Hong Kong experts emphasize the importance of driving awareness around the disease in
view of the high prevalence of viral hepatitis infection*

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. Leading gastroenterology and hepatology experts in Hong Kong, who form an integral part of the Coalition, are in full support of all efforts to increase awareness and promote health education to combat low public awareness and improve understanding of the disease and its implications, by patients and the general community alike.

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.

“CEVHAP is committed to utilising the collective expertise of its members in the region to partner with government bodies in policy formulation and health education,” said Professor Ching-Lung Lai, Simon KY Lee Professorship in Gastroenterology, Chair Professor of Medicine and Hepatology at the Department of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong and a member of CEVHAP. “The challenges and burden of viral hepatitis on our health systems will escalate unless a coordinated action is employed to tackle the issue.”

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. In Southeast Asia including Hong Kong, the overall prevalence of chronic hepatitis B infection is high (>8%).² For hepatitis C, it is estimated that 2-3% of world population carry hepatitis C virus.³

“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 DS Chen, Distinguished Chair Professor of the College of Medicine at National Taiwan University and co-founder of CEVHAP.

The number of people chronically infected with and annually dying as a result of viral hepatitis is on the same scale as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. 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.

“As experts in the field, our role is to ensure Asia Pacific including Hong Kong, is part of WHO’s global approach to tackle the problem of viral hepatitis. We aim to leverage World Hepatitis Day to drive awareness around the health, social and economic burden of viral hepatitis in Hong Kong and the need for a collaborative approach to address the issue,” added Professor Lai.

There is urgency within Asia Pacific to implement policies that provide patients access to screening and treatment. Currently, more than half of chronic hepatitis patients live in countries with no provision for free testing and 41 percent of patients live in countries where no government funding exists for treatment of hepatitis B or C.⁴

About CEVHAP

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is the first organization 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



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partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies in public policy formulation and health education. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org.

CEVHAP members in Hong Kong

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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, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam.

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