

Media Release

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Australian specialist develops new tools for the fight against hepatitis B

A set of innovative information resources designed to improve the treatment rates of Australia's 170,000* hepatitis B sufferers and reduce the incidence of hepatitis B-related liver cancer and liver failure was launched at Liverpool Hospital today.

The launch was attended by leading healthcare professionals including NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant, Director, World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory Professor Stephen Locarnini and the Chairman of the Australian Liver Association, (ALA) Geoff McCaughan, underlining the significance of the event which was timed to coincide with World Hepatitis Day on 28 July 2012.

The DVD and flipchart, partly funded by the global Advancing the Clinical Treatment of Hepatitis B Virus initiative, were developed by Dr Miriam Levy, the Head of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Liverpool Hospital in Sydney.

- *What happens if you have Hepatitis B?* - A DVD for patients and carers explains hepatitis B through stories about three people living with the virus.
- *Hepatitis B Bear and You* - An illustrated flipchart designed as a patient teaching aid for health care workers simplifies the five typical stages of hepatitis B infection.

Dr Miriam Levy, Head of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Liverpool Hospital said the resources were developed to help patients better understand their condition and the distinct phases of the disease.

"Only a small proportion of people infected with hepatitis B suffer any symptoms," said Dr Levy.

"By increasing patient awareness of the different stages of the virus and the importance of proper management we hope to increase the number of patients who participate in regular monitoring, so they will get treatment when they need it.

"Treatment in certain phases is necessary to reduce the chance of developing hepatitis B-related liver cancer and liver failure," she said

World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory Professor Stephen Locarnini said the communication of accurate and appropriate information for people with chronic hepatitis B was a priority.

"We know that patients with a good understanding of the impact of chronic infection, the purpose of treatment, and the objectives of treatment are more likely to adhere to treatment and respond effectively to advice of their treating doctor," said Professor Locarnini.

“Dr Levy and the team behind these resources are to be commended for this initiative, and I encourage other Health Districts in Australia to consider making these resources available to their health care workers and hepatitis B patients,” he said.

The new hepatitis B resources have been endorsed by eight** Australian health bodies and organisations including South Western Sydney Local Health District, the Australian Liver Association and the NSW Cancer Council.

Copies of the DVD are freely available from NSW health services as well as a number of bodies and organisations concerned with hepatitis patient well-being across NSW. Patients and carers can request a free DVD copy of *What happens if you have Hepatitis B?* from Liverpool Hospital’s Gastroenterology and Hepatology department by calling 02 8738 4074, or view it on the SWS Local Health District website www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au and the Liverpool Hospital Facebook page. The flip chart will be available in multiple languages and the DVD dubbed and subtitled in Vietnamese and Mandarin.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

***Hepatitis B in Australia**

It is estimated that 170,000 people live with chronic hepatitis B in Australia. The requirement for treatment of hepatitis B varies from patient to patient, making monitoring of the virus and its stages critical for those with the virus. Only two percent of those with hepatitis B in Australia receive treatment.ⁱ There is strong evidence that the early detection, follow-up and monitoring of chronic hepatitis B can slow the progression to liver failure and reduce the development of hepatocellular carcinoma (liver cancer). Yet the number of people dying as a result of chronic hepatitis B, and the number of cases of hepatitis B-related liver cancer in Australia are increasing despite improvements in antiviral therapy.ⁱⁱ Almost half of those with hepatitis B in Australia were born in highly endemic countries of the Asia-Pacific region (49%) with other high-risk groups including people born in other endemic regions (22%) and Indigenous Australians (16%).ⁱⁱⁱ The number of people dying as a result of chronic hepatitis B in Australia is projected to increase from 450 per year in 2008 to 1,550 per year in 2017 with the total direct costs estimated to increase to \$2.4 billion by 2017.^{iv}

****Endorsing Australian health bodies**

The new hepatitis B resources have been endorsed by the following health bodies and organisations:

- Gastroenterological Society of Australia: Australian Liver Association
- Gastroenterological Society of Australia: Digestive Health Foundation
- Hepatitis NSW
- Australasian Society for HIV Medicines (ASHM)
- Australian Society of Infectious Diseases (ASID)
- Cancer Council
- Australian Hepatology Association
- South Western Sydney Local Health District

About CEVHAP

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) was established in October 2010 as a multidisciplinary body to advocate for public policy reforms that reduce the burden of viral hepatitis in Asia-Pacific, a region where 75% of all deaths attributable to hepatitis B occur. CEVHAP is committed to building partnerships with others who share the same goals including: governments, NGOs, the business sector, academic researchers, civil society and people themselves who are infected.

CEVHAP is the first organisation based in the Asia Pacific region to dedicate its efforts to this cause and Australia has an important role to play. With all but two of Australia's closest neighbours being developing nations, it is vital that Australia continues to lead in initiatives such as the development of national strategies and the tools launched today by Dr Miriam Levy.
www.cevhap.org

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i The Kirby Institute. HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia. Annual Surveillance Report 2011. Sydney, NSW: The Kirby Institute for Infection and Immunity in Society, University of New South Wales 2011.

ii Butler JR, Korda RJ, Watson KJ, Watson AR. The impact of chronic hepatitis B in Australia: Projecting mortality, morbidity and economic impact. Canberra, ACT: Australian Centre for Economic Research on Health 2009.

iii O'Sullivan BG, Gidding HF, Law M, Kaldor JM, Gilbert GL, Dore GJ. Estimates of chronic hepatitis B virus infection in Australia, 2000. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 2004; 28(3):212-6.

iv Butler JR, Korda RJ, Watson KJ, Watson AR. The impact of chronic hepatitis B in Australia: Projecting mortality, morbidity and economic impact. Canberra, ACT: Australian Centre for Economic Research on Health 2009.