

Action needed ASAP to fight viral hepatitis

National action plans are urgently needed to prevent and control viral hepatitis, the leading cause of liver cancer. Liver cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in Asia Pacific

Singapore (Friday, 25 July 2014) – The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is, in advance of World Hepatitis Day on 28 July 2014, calling upon governments across Asia-Pacific to develop and implement coordinated national action plans to fight viral hepatitis. Viral hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer.

In Asia Pacific, chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C together with other forms of viral hepatitis kill over one million people per year, a death rate that is three times higher than HIV/AIDS.¹

Chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C are major reasons for liver diseases, causing 78% of all liver cancer globally.² Across the world in less developed regions, people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections are most susceptible to developing cancer, with data showing that the viruses are responsible for 32% of all new infection-caused cancer cases per year in low- and middle-income countries, more than any other types of infection.³

Data from the 2014 World Cancer Report show that liver cancer is now the second most common cause of cancer death in Asia Pacific.⁴

Although viral hepatitis is an enormous and complex health threat, practical actions can substantially reduce the disease burden. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a four-part blueprint – the Framework for Global Action – that guides national governments on effective ways to prevent and control the spread of viral hepatitis. The Framework has four parts, or Axes, which can be summarized as “**ASAP**”:

A for Awareness raising, partnership promotion and resource mobilization (Axis 1)

S for Scientific evidence to drive policy and action (Axis 2)

A for Access to immunization and information to prevent transmission (Axis 3)

P for Provision of screening, care and treatment (Axis 4)

This practical framework can be of great assistance to governments across the region, as Professor Ding-Shinn Chen, Chair of CEVHAP and Immediate Past Dean of the College of Medicine, National Taiwan University, explains: “Socio-economic conditions vary between Asia-Pacific countries, but through front-line clinical practice and extensive research across

the region, CEVHAP experts have found that the actions recommended by the WHO Framework for Global Action are applicable and urgently needed in most countries. We ask national governments use the framework as a guide to develop national action plans as soon as possible.”

This call to action was recently echoed by the World Health Assembly resolution on viral hepatitis, which urges member states to develop and implement coordinated national action plans for preventing, diagnosing and treating viral hepatitis. The new resolution on viral hepatitis (WHA67.6) was unanimously adopted during the 67th World Health Assembly in May 2014, representing a worldwide consensus on the need for more concrete action to fight viral hepatitis.

According to the WHO’s latest survey of ministries of health worldwide, only half of the countries surveyed in Asia Pacific have a national action plan to prevent and control the spread of viral hepatitis.⁵ This is despite the fact that 70% of the world’s hepatitis-related deaths occur in the region.¹

National governments are not alone in the fight against viral hepatitis. Drawing on lessons learnt from combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, cross-sector partnerships have proven to be effective in mobilizing the expertise and resources needed to prevent and treat diseases of wide prevalence and high mortality.

Cross-sector partnerships will be particularly critical to the development of a much-needed international funding mechanism. Funding issues present a significant barrier to the ability of governments to implement comprehensive measures aimed at reducing the disease burden of viral hepatitis, especially in low and mid-income countries.

Professor Stephen Locarnini, Director of the WHO Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) and Joint Secretary of CEVHAP, says: “Over the past decade, we have seen the emergence of many avenues of funding which have significantly broadened access to diagnostics and treatments for diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria and we believe the same can be achieved for viral hepatitis. It is time for governments to **invest** in their people’s health and liver health must be the top priority. WHO has given a Framework to guide the development of national action plans and we urge them to use it.”

Available upon request:

- Fact sheet and info-graphic on Asia Pacific viral hepatitis and liver cancer mortality
- Fact sheet and info-graphic on the WHO Framework for Global Action

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 reform to reduce the burden of and ultimately eliminate viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

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

CEVHAP is working closely with the WHO, having assisted the WHO in launching its landmark Global Hepatitis Network in Singapore in June 2013, as well as having taken part in the WHO Global Partners' Meeting on Hepatitis in March 2014. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org, or follow CEVHAP on:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CEVHAP>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Cevhap?fref=ts>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/cevhap-coalition-to-eradicate-viral-hepatitis-in-asia-pacific->

Weibo: <http://weibo.com/u/2805067764>

World Hepatitis Day 2014 in Asia Pacific

The seventh annual World Hepatitis Day will take place on Monday, 28 July 2014, as part of an on-going campaign launched by the World Hepatitis Alliance in 2008. This is the fourth year that CEVHAP has helped support and coordinate World Hepatitis Day in Asia Pacific and also the fourth year that the WHO has endorsed World Hepatitis Day.

In Asia Pacific, CEVHAP's members across Asia Pacific will be coordinating a wide range of events and activities to mark World Hepatitis Day.

Global Response to Viral Hepatitis

The first WHO resolution on viral hepatitis was adopted in 2010 (WHA63.18) and has, over the last three years, led to the formation of a dedicated viral hepatitis unit within the WHO, the development of the WHO Framework for Global Action and most recently, the founding of a WHO Global Hepatitis Network, of which CEVHAP is a member. Information regarding the Global Hepatitis Programme, Framework and Network can be found here:

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/en/>

In May 2014, the World Health Assembly adopted the second WHO resolution on viral hepatitis (WHA67.6), providing guidance to governments on how to prioritize actions to tackle all forms of viral hepatitis in a coordinated manner. The resolution requests that the WHO establishes a monitoring system to track progress made by member states, and consider setting goals for the elimination of hepatitis B and C. The resolution also calls, for the first time, upon all UN funds, programs and agencies to move viral hepatitis up their agenda. More information regarding the new resolution can be found here:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/WHA-20140522/en/>

References:

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2. JF Perz1 et al. The contributions of hepatitis B virus and hepatitis C virus infections to cirrhosis and primary liver cancer worldwide. *Journal of Hepatology*, 45(4):529-38. 2006.
3. de Martel, C et al. Global burden of cancers attributable to infections in 2008: a review and synthetic analysis. *Lancet Oncology*, 13(6):607-6015. 2012.
4. International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organization. GLOBOCAN 2012. 2013. Available: <http://globocan.iarc.fr> (data on file).
5. World Health Organization. Global policy report on the prevention and control of viral hepatitis in WHO Member States. 2013. Available: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/global_report/en/index.html

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