

PRESS RELEASE

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High-profile meeting of health experts looks to address escalating impact of viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific

Policy forum recognises urgent need for strengthened public policy to address diseases that cause over one million deaths in Asia Pacific every year

Delegates will hear from two keynote speakers:

Professor Chris Baggoley, Chief Medical Officer of the Australian Department of Health

Mr Ge Yanfeng, Head of Social Research at the Development Research Centre, State Council of the People's Republic of China

Brisbane, Australia (Friday 14 March 2014) – The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) are today hosting a high-profile meeting of viral hepatitis experts from across the region as they look to address the escalating impact of viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

The policy forum, held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver (APASL), in Brisbane, Australia, aims to identify the tools, actions and processes needed to build the case for the development of national viral hepatitis action plans.

Viral hepatitis is one of the world's greatest health threats, with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating that chronic hepatitis B and C affect over 500 million people worldwide. The situation in Asia Pacific is particularly dire, with 74% of the total hepatitis B population living in the region and 20% of the hepatitis C population living in South East Asia alone.¹

Despite the significant disease burden, a recent WHO policy survey of ministries of health worldwide found that only half of the countries surveyed in Asia Pacific reported having a national strategy in place for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis.²

The lack of a strategic approach to tackling viral hepatitis in many countries is particularly worrying given newly released data shows that even with advances in treatment and the success of the hepatitis B vaccination programmes in many countries, the mortality rate associated with viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific has risen from 695,000 deaths per year in 1990 to over one million deaths per year in 2010.³

The annual mortality rate associated with viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific is three times as high as HIV/AIDS and nine times as high as malaria.³

CEVHAP believes that dedicated national viral hepatitis action plans are urgently needed and that a cross-sector partnership approach, involving clinicians, public health experts, patients and governments, is critical to their success. This approach is also in accordance with guidance from the WHO, which, in December 2012, launched a Framework for Global Action to help governments develop national strategies to tackle viral hepatitis.

Speaking ahead of the policy forum, Professor Ding-Shinn Chen, Chair of CEVHAP and Immediate Past Dean of the College of Medicine, National Taiwan University, Taipei explained that “The global response to viral hepatitis has built momentum recently, but to date, action in Asia Pacific has largely been slow and uncoordinated, with very few cross-sector partnerships to support national or regional efforts to combat viral hepatitis. Each country in Asia Pacific can derive great benefits from a more coordinated response and we hope this policy forum will establish a much needed regional blueprint for a partnership response to these diseases.”

The recent WHO policy survey also showed that while the last decade has witnessed significant breakthroughs in the development of effective medicines for chronic hepatitis B and C, only half of the countries in Asia Pacific make publicly-funded treatment available.²

One of two keynote speakers at the policy forum, Professor Chris Baggoley, Chief Medical Officer of the Australian Department of Health will speak about the WHO's work, and Australia's experience, in preventing and managing viral hepatitis.

The forum will assess the implementation of effective policy strategies where they exist and hear from regional experts from CEVHAP and WHO on work currently being undertaken in the region to combat viral hepatitis, including that of WHO's newly formed Global Hepatitis Network.

Fellow keynote speaker, Mr Ge Yanfeng, Head of Social Research at the Development Research Center, State Council of the People's Republic of China welcomed the policy forum as an opportunity to drive greater regional leadership in the global fight to eradicate viral hepatitis. “My hope for this policy forum is that we ultimately mobilise best practice, strengthen national strategies and add further weight to the argument for greater international funding to support low- and middle-income countries, many of which shoulder the largest burden of viral hepatitis.”

The policy forum is the latest partnership initiative from CEVHAP, the only organisation of its kind in the region dedicated to public policy reform to reduce the burden of viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

About CEVHAP

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

Incorporated in October 2010, CEVHAP became a Founding Member of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Hepatitis Network in 2013. CEVHAP has a membership comprised of many world-renowned hepatitis experts, including people living with the infections, 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 formation and health education. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org

Global Response to Viral Hepatitis

In May 2010, the World Health Assembly ratified a resolution on viral hepatitis (WHA63 R18), the first time such a resolution had been agreed by the world's foremost health authority. The passing of resolution 63.18 signalled the start of a new era of recognition, coordination and partnership, which in the last three years has led to the formation of a dedicated viral hepatitis unit within 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 Founding Member.

In June 2013 CEVHAP hosted members of the WHO's Global Hepatitis Programme at APASL Liver Week 2013 as they launched the Global Hepatitis Network, a new initiative that aims to build capacity and strengthen national, regional and global action to tackle viral hepatitis. Further information regarding the Global Hepatitis Programme, Framework and Network can be found here: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/en/>

References:

1. World Health Organization. Prevention & Control of Viral Hepatitis Infection: Framework for Global Action. 2012. Available: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/Framework/en/index.html>
2. 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
3. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. 2013. Available: <http://www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org/gbd> (data on file)

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