

PRESS RELEASE

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Experts call for renewed international commitment to address health needs of 340 million people in the Asia Pacific region infected with viral hepatitis

CEVHAP members calling for a coordinated response to combat two diseases that together affect eight times as many people living with HIV, TB and malaria in Asia Pacific

<<INSERT City>>, <<INSERT Country>> (Friday 27 July 2012) – On the eve of World Hepatitis Day, experts from the Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) are calling on governments and the international community to redouble their efforts to tackle two diseases that are significant contributors to poverty in Asia Pacific and affect 340 million people across the region^{1,2}.

The group of experts is speaking out because of their concern that despite hepatitis B and hepatitis C affecting more people than HIV, TB and malaria in Asia Pacific combined, the diseases lack the coordinated response and financial support that these other major global health threats have.

CEVHAP believes the global response to HIV, TB and malaria coordinated by UNAIDS, The Stop TB Partnership and Rollback Malaria, together with their inclusion in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), shows what can be achieved when governments, the medical community, donor organizations and civil society come together in a collective response.

“Excluding viral hepatitis from initiatives such as the MDGs has pushed viral hepatitis to the fringes of global health,” said Prof Ding-Shinn Chen, Immediate Past Dean of the National Taiwan University College of Medicine and Chair of CEVHAP. “Viral hepatitis puts a significant burden on national economies and plunges many people into avoidable poverty. A renewed international commitment is urgently needed if we are to begin the important task of helping those infected, preventing new infections and ultimately eliminating hepatitis B and C in Asia Pacific.”

Asia Pacific has the largest number of people living with viral hepatitis of any world region and global estimates show that 75% of deaths attributable to hepatitis B occur in the region³. While malaria is considered an African emergency, a silent crisis is also occurring in Asia Pacific as a result of chronic viral hepatitis. Not only is the epidemic strongest in Asia Pacific but as “silent” diseases, where for most people there are few symptoms, people are often unaware that they are infected with hepatitis B and C until it is too late. This results in millions of people being struck down in the prime of their working lives and leading many to severe poverty.

“Poverty is inextricably linked to the viral hepatitis epidemic and compounds the heavy burden that treating the diseases already has on the healthcare costs of national governments,” explained Prof Stephen Locarnini, Head, WHO Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B, Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory and Joint Secretary of CEVHAP. “Hepatitis B and C leaves patients without jobs, children without parents and families without hope, and the international community can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to these devastating diseases.”

Unlike HIV, TB and malaria, action to combat viral hepatitis remains woefully under-resourced. On World Hepatitis Day, CEVHAP is calling on the international community, aid organizations and corporate donors to think about the lives of the 340 million people living with viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific when considering investing in international development initiatives.

In 2010 the World Health Assembly passed a resolution (WHA63 R18), which for the first time recognized the scale of the viral hepatitis epidemic and the international resolve needed to tackle it. As part of the resolution, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that a global strategy would be developed to provide governments with a framework to deliver real improvements in public health policies. The WHO also established the Global Hepatitis Programme with the following goals to reduce the:

- Transmission of agents that cause viral hepatitis
- Morbidity and mortality due to viral hepatitis through improving the care of patients with viral hepatitis
- Socio-economic impact of viral hepatitis at individual, community and population levels.

To support the global strategy, CEVHAP in collaboration with the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, has developed a plan of research to assist countries and the World Health Assembly to identify the essential components of a coordinated strategic response to chronic viral hepatitis. This important work is underway, with research assessing the policy landscape in Taiwan, a needs assessment of people with chronic viral hepatitis in five locations across China, and support for the facilitation of unique partnership initiatives in Malaysia.

<<INSERT Country Member Quotes and National World Hepatitis Day activities>>

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. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org

CEVHAP Members in <<INSERT country>>

<<INSERT details>>

World Hepatitis Day 2012 in Asia Pacific

The fifth annual World Hepatitis Day will take place on Saturday 28th July 2012, as part of an ongoing campaign launched by the World Hepatitis Alliance in 2008. This is the second year that CEVHAP has helped support and coordinate World Hepatitis Day in Asia Pacific and also the second 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

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. Since then the WHO has developed a comprehensive implementation strategy which pulls together a wide range of products within the organization's armamentarium to assist countries in the development of national responses to viral hepatitis. Within Asia Pacific, the Western Pacific and South East Asia WHO Regional Offices will be working with national governments to translate the global strategy at both regional and national levels.

References:

1. Patel et al., 2006; 2) Kowdley et al., 2012; 3) Goldstein et al., 2005.

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