

Launch of World Health Organization Global Hepatitis Network

Press Release

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) welcomes the launch and dedicates their support to the Global Hepatitis Network

Chronic hepatitis B and C are regional health issues of unparalleled proportions, putting a significant burden on national economies and plunging many people into avoidable poverty

Singapore (Friday 7 June, 2013) – Leading viral hepatitis expert organization, the Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) today welcomed the international launch of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Global Hepatitis Network, which took place in Singapore on the first day of APASL Liver Week 2013.

Chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C are regional health issues of significant proportions for Asia and the Pacific with millions of people struck down in the prime of their working lives, often leading to severe poverty and putting an untold and increasing burden on national economies.

The total number of people living with chronic hepatitis B and C around the world is 500 million, with 350 million people chronically infected with hepatitis B and 150 million people with hepatitis C¹. The Asia Pacific region carries the largest burden of chronic hepatitis B infection, with an estimated 74% of the total chronic hepatitis B population living in the region¹. The recently published Global Burden of Disease Study showed that approximately 1.4 million people die as a result of viral hepatitis each year², a similar figure to the number of deaths caused by HIV/AIDS.

Until recently, viral hepatitis has not received the level of attention or resources seen with diseases of comparable prevalence and mortality, such as HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. CEVHAP believes this lack of coordination has undermined efforts to control hepatitis B and C, and has pushed these diseases to the fringes of global health.

The Global Hepatitis Network is an initiative from the WHO's Global Hepatitis Programme that will build capacity and strengthen national, regional and global action to tackle viral hepatitis. The WHO will provide secretariat support to the Global Hepatitis Network, with a chair and steering committee overseeing a number of regional and technical working groups. A major focus for the Global Hepatitis Network will be to work on activities that strengthen international collaboration around WHO's Framework for the Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis, which is focused on four distinct axes:

- Axis 1: Raising awareness, promoting partnerships and mobilizing resources
- Axis 2: Evidence-based policy and data for action
- Axis 3: Prevention of transmission
- Axis 4: Screening, care and treatment

Welcoming the launch of the Global Hepatitis Network, APASL Liver Week Chair and a CEVHAP founding member, Professor Seng Gee Lim said "A systematic and coordinated

response across Asia Pacific is essential to combat these diseases. Every day clinicians witness the significant challenges that national health services face in combating viral hepatitis and we hope the Global Hepatitis Network will inject new vigor into the global and regional response.”

CEVHAP is ideally placed to support the work of the Global Hepatitis Network in Asia Pacific, and is in the process of applying for membership. Welcoming the news, Professor Ding-Shinn Chen, Chair of CEVHAP, commented that “The Global Hepatitis Network represents an excellent opportunity for greater collaboration between governments and expert groups, and will we hope mobilize resources that are urgently needed. The launch of the Network reflects the growing recognition that viral hepatitis is as serious a global threat as HIV, TB and malaria, something that is crucially important to elevate attention and drive action.”

Speaking at the launch of the Global Hepatitis Network, Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance and a founding member of CEVHAP noted “The greatest challenge for the Global Hepatitis Network will be to access resources that are urgently needed to tackle viral hepatitis. The major global health funds still exclude hepatitis and despite significant advancements in treatment, the funding situation has led to an era of neglect and a spiral in deaths.”

Professor Stephen Locarnini, Joint Secretary of CEVHAP and Director of the WHO Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) welcomed the news, saying “We applaud the leadership of WHO’s Global Hepatitis Programme in forming this network. As a WHO Regional Reference Laboratory in the region, VIDRL have already learned the power of international collaboration and this new network demonstrates the important progress and resource commitment being made by WHO.”

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

References:

1. WHO. Prevention & Control of Viral Hepatitis Infection: Framework for Global Action. 2012. Available: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/Framework/en/index.html>
2. Lozano et al. Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. *Lancet* 2012; 380:2095-128.

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