

Prevention of Blindness and Deafness News

WHO Director-General focusses on avoidable blindness...

The WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, attended the annual Lions Clubs International Convention in Busan, Republic of Korea, on 25 June 2012. She delivered the key note speech to over 50,000 participants. She referred to WHO's recent data on visual impairment reporting the global decrease of visual impairment and blindness. Dr Chan highlighted the lack of health coverage for 2.7 billion people in the world. Dr Chan described the Lions – WHO cooperative agreement dedicated to reducing blindness, in particular through trachoma elimination, control of childhood blindness and diabetic retinopathy. Dr Chan highlighted the leading role being taken by Lions in preventing blindness throughout the world. The Director-General's full speech is available at the following web link:

http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2012/blindness_20120625/en/index.html



An updated action plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment ...

The World Health Assembly reviewed the Secretariat's progress report implementing the 2009-2013 action plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. A number of Member States made interventions.

Progress continues on developing the 2014-2019 action plan. The Secretariat received responses to the discussion paper posted on the web. An initial draft of the action plan will be posted on the WHO webpage shortly. In developing the draft, the Secretariat has been supported by a small number of international experts.



Working in partnership to eliminate NTDs...

Onchocerciasis: The 136th session of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies (CSA) of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) was held between 3-5 April 2012 in Atlanta. In addition to discussions on several technical issues, the meeting discussed the APOC Governing Board's discussion for the programme to pursue elimination of onchocerciasis in Africa as well as co-implementation of preventive chemotherapy intervention for other selected NTDS in the context of increased support to community-level health systems strengthening.

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CSA also provided guidance to APOC Management in the preparation of the detailed Strategic Plan of Action 2016 – 2025, in line with the extension of the APOC beyond 2015.

In May 2012, the Federal Ministry of Health, Sudan, announced that it had stopped the transmission of onchocerciasis in Abu Hamad, Sudan. This achievement required significant involvement of community volunteers, local women and partners to provide effective health education and Ivermectin treatment. The strong partnership between the people of Abu Hamad, the Federal Ministry of Health, health ministries of the River Nile and Northern states, The Carter Center, Lions Clubs International Foundation, Merck and the Mectizan Donation Program, Michigan State University, the University of South Florida, the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control, and other partners was critical in this success.

Trachoma: the 2012 session of the Trachoma Scientific Informal Workshop was held in Baltimore and hosted by Johns Hopkins on 11 May 2012. Recent research findings were presented. Quality of surgery and large geographical coverage with antibiotic treatment were among the issues discussed.

The 16th Meeting of the WHO Alliance for the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma by the year 2020 (GET 2020) was held between 14-16 May 2012 in Washington DC. Forty national coordinators and a total of 99 participants attended. The meeting focused on NTDs, the funding needed for trachoma elimination and water and sanitation from the WASH perspective. While some countries have reached elimination thresholds, there are many which lag behind in terms of disease assessment, and SAFE implementation. Renewed efforts were recommended to successfully reach the goal of elimination in 2020. Important announcements included: the single trachoma data collection tool, developed by WHO and TFGH; new versions of the trachoma management manuals; and the expanded role of the WHO Regional Offices. An evaluation of the meeting suggested that the more interactive format was popular. Conclusions and recommendations from the meeting are available on request.



The second regional programme managers meeting on Trachoma Elimination of the Americas was held in April 2012 in Guatemala.

Working in partnership elsewhere...

WHO and CBM-Italy provided support to the Pastoral for Health of the Holy See in their first International Study Meeting for the Blind Persons, 4-5 May 2012 in Rome.

The conference was attended by over 150 participants and 44 speakers from 24 countries. More information available here: http://www.holyseeforhealth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114:international-study-meeting-4-5-may-2012&catid=117:activities&Itemid=198&lang=en

A workshop on eye care inequities was sponsored by the AIECI -Catedra UNESCO with WHO's participation in May in Guatemala.

A Workshop on the National Plan of Prevention of Blindness 2012 was hosted by the Indonesian Ophthalmologist Association from 26-28 June 2012 in Jakarta to review and refine National Plans to reach the goal of V2020. The draft National Action Plan for Prevention of Blindness which was reviewed and there were discussions on the global action plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. And in Honduras, a national workshop to develop a national eye care plan was held in June.

WHO-PAHO-DANA CENTER- PAAO have been analysing data on the effectiveness of the schoolchildren program in Concepción, Chile. And in Cuba, WHO has been supporting work on a RAAB study with support from CBM and ORBIS.

Research ...

A 5-year collaborative contract between WHO and the US National Eye Institute was completed. The agenda was centred around epidemiological studies of visual impairment and blindness in China and India, and follow-up studies of myopia in children and presbyopia, both conducted according to the standardised protocols in several international study sites. Additionally, further efforts were dedicated to developing public health strategies to control avoidable visual impairment due to glaucoma. The studies on myopia provided insight into risk factors. Studies on presbyopia resulted in valuable findings on its prevalence and utilization of near vision correction.

Moving ahead with the re-established Programme for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment ...

On May 21, 2012, in her address at the 65th World Health Assembly, Dr Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization stated *“WHO estimates that nearly 40% of people older than 65 years have a disabling hearing impairment.”* She said that *“WHO has launched an initiative to develop appropriate assistive devices for the world’s rapidly ageing populations. These are things like mobile phones adapted for the visually impaired and robust low-cost hearing aids.”* She also commented on the fact that *“affordability is important, but so are simplicity and ease of use, as this relieves some of the pressure on specialized care and further reduces costs.”*

The full text is available at: http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2012/wha_20120521/en/index.html

WHO is currently undertaking a survey of national plans and programmes for the prevention of hearing loss. It is expected that responses will give an understanding on global activities in this area.

WHO continues to work with Sri Lanka to develop a national programme for prevention of hearing loss. Sri Lanka has established a national committee and a task force for development and implementation of the National Programme, as part of the primary health care system of the country. The programme is being supported by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Hearing Conservation Council. It is expected to be launched later in 2012.



Under the aegis of the Todos con Voz (All with Voice) programme for prevention and rehabilitation of disabilities in Nicaragua, the government of Nicaragua is developing and launching its programme for prevention of hearing loss. The process was initiated with a workshop in May 2012, with support from the WHO. The programme is a partnership between the MOH, WHO Regional office, CBM, Mayflower Medical Outreach and others. The Central American Ear and Hearing Care Workshop took place in San Salvador in May. It was sponsored and supported by CBM and WHO participated. WHO participated in the All Africa ENT and Audiology Congress in Zimbabwe in June.

Forthcoming meetings...

1. Guyana, 9-10 July: National workshop to elaborate a new national eye care plan
2. Paris, France, 10-12 July: The 137th session of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies.
3. Trinidad, 11-14 July: Ophthalmologic Society of West Indies, prevention on blindness symposium.
4. Venezuela, 23-27 July: National workshop to elaborate new national eye care plan.
5. Sydney, Australia, 3-6 September: The 40th session of the Non-Governmental Development Organization will be held alongside the third session of the NTD NGDO Network.
6. Columbia, 6-7 September: Low Vision national workshop in Colombia supported by Catedra UNESCO,
7. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 10-14 September: 35th session of the Technical Consultative Committee (TCC 35) session.
8. Colombo, Sri Lanka, 11-13 Spetember 2012: 4th General Body Meeting of the Sound Hearing 2030 initiative.

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