

News Tidbits

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WHO Warning on Underfunding TB

JPMS NEWS

Data published in the WHO 2011 Global Tuberculosis Control Report shows that the number of people dying from TB fell to its lowest level in a decade (1.4 million in 2010 after reaching the highest of 1.8 million in 2003). Also, the number of people who fell ill with TB dropped to 8.8 million in 2010 after a peak of nine million in 2005.

The Report however states that current progress is at risk from underfunding, especially in efforts to combat multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB). The number of MDR-TB patients treated increased to 46,000 in 2010. Out of the US\$ 1 billion gap that has been reported by countries for 2012, US\$ 200 million is for the MDR-TB response. Another cause of concern is HIV/TB co-infection. In 2010, 1.1 million people living with HIV developed TB - 82% of them (900,000 people) in Africa. Worldwide, 12% of TB patients have HIV co-infection.

Governments should ensure that fund channels do not dry up. The report also calls for more international co-operation particularly due to the fact that almost all low-income nations depended heavily on external funding.

Xarelto (rivaroxaban) approved for stroke reduction in Atrial Fibrillation

JPMS NEWS

The U.S. FDS has approved the anti-clotting drug Xarelto (rivaroxaban). It is a direct Factor Xa inhibitor which will be used to reduce the risk of stroke in people who have non-valvular atrial fibrillation.

The approval is based on a clinical trial with more than 14,000 patients comparing Xarelto with the anti-clotting drug warfarin. In the trial, Xarelto was similar to warfarin in its ability to prevent stroke as well as the risk of bleeding (the most dreaded and common side effect of any anti-clotting drug).

Xarelto has the advantage of once daily dosing but the drug should not be discontinued or started without the advice of a medical professional because discontinuing the drug can increase the risk of stroke.

First specific drug for Scorpion sting approved

JPMS NEWS

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the first specific treatment for scorpion stings. Anascorp, Centruroides Immune F(ab')₂ (Equine), is an antibody extracted from the plasma of horses vaccinated against viruses transmissible to humans, and exposed to scorpion venom. It is directed against the venom of Centruroides scorpions, found primarily in Arizona, which account for a majority of scorpion bites in the United States.

The safety and efficacy was established through studies, since 2004, on a total of 1,534 subjects. The most common side effects were vomiting, nausea, fever, rash, itchiness, headache, runny nose, and muscle pain. Allergic reactions in patients sensitized to horse proteins may occur with Anascorp. FDA designated Anascorp as an Orphan drug and gave it a priority review.

Another step towards Malaria Vaccine

JPMS NEWS

New England Journal of Medicine published the interim results of Phase 3 Trial of RTS, S/AS01 Malaria Vaccine recently. The study was funded by GlaxoSmithKline

Biologicals and the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and involved 15,460 children in two age groups: 6–12 weeks of age and 5-17 months. In the first 6,000 children of the older children category, the vaccine had an efficacy against clinical malaria of around 50%. The efficacy of the vaccine against severe malaria in this same group was around 45% and in the combined age category it was 34.8%. However, it must be clear that the vaccines will not be a magic bullet for the problem of malaria. It offers only partial protection.

The World Health Organization (WHO) through its website has already taken the unusual step of indicating that it could recommend this first malaria vaccine for use in some African countries as early as 2015, depending on the full phase 3 trial results that will become available in 2014.

Landmark Australian Bill on Plain Packaging of Cigarettes

JPMS NEWS

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's government is aiming to introduce the world's first legislation that would force all cigarettes to be sold in plain packaging from 1st December 2012. Cigarettes have been implicated as a carcinogen for decades. Plain packaging entails the use of a only standard type fonts in a single color on a plain background to provide minimum information necessary to identify a product without the use of any logos, colors, designs, images or even stylized fonts of additional descriptive terms. Thus all cigarette packets will look the same irrespective of their brand.

In response, a leading cigarette manufacturer has launched legal action, claiming Australia's plans violates international trade obligations and has warned that it expects billions of dollars in compensation if plain packaging goes ahead.

The WHO however has come out in open support of the Australian Government. WHO Director General, Margaret Chan has said, "It is horrific to think that an industry known for its dirty tricks and dirty laundry could be allowed to trump what is clearly in the public's best interests." She has also warned that the WHO was "gearing up" to support other countries that took such measures.

Ferriprox approved for Iron Overload

JPMS NEWS

FDA, USA approved Ferriprox (deferiprone) to treat patients with iron overload due to blood transfusions in patients with thalassemia, who have an inadequate response to currently available chelation therapy.

The drug's manufacturer ApoPharma has also given a commitment to FDA to further study the drug in patients with sickle cell anaemia who have transfusion overload.

Crowd Out AIDS- an UNAIDS initiative

JPMS NEWS

UNAIDS has launched an online collaborative project CrowdOutAIDS.org to crowdsource its new strategy on youth and HIV—a first in the UN system.

It will use crowdsourcing technologies & familiar online tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Renren to ensure youth engagement and action in the AIDS response.

CrowdOutAIDS.org followed a four-step model and was open to anyone aged 15-29 years. Young people were engaged to shape the new strategy from conceptualization to final drafting via a wiki-platform. The project ran over a period of two months and the final crowd sourced strategy will be produced in 2012. This marks the first time that such an initiative has been taken by a world body like UNAIDS.

Medical Research Fund in Pakistan

JPMS NEWS

The Chief Minister of Punjab, Pakistan has declared that work on establishing a new Punjab Medical Research Fund has started. This Declaration came at the end of October when he was presiding over a meeting to review the steps taken to eradicate the dengue virus.

Mobile Phones and Immunization

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India's Health Minister has announced that his ministry has been supervising the collection of about 26 million mobile numbers of pregnant women in India since January 2011 and it plans to have a full proof system by December 2012 to track and ensure that their babies (as well as the ones who will be born in the future) receive all immunizations as per the GOI's National Immunization Schedule.

By phoning mothers, the central government will check on whether their babies are fully immunized and identify districts where children are not getting vaccines. In addition, the central government will be able to check on the accuracy of data collected locally, which is often in doubt. If implemented, it would be the largest of such exercises attempted anywhere in the world.

World Conference on Social Determinants of Health in Brazil

JPMS NEWS

World Conference on Social Determinants of Health was held on 19th to 21st October 2011 with a backdrop of life expectancy gap between countries being 36 years. The conference brought together over 1000 participants representing more than 125 Member States and a diverse group of stakeholders. On 21st October 2011, participating Member States adopted the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health 2011 which aims to bridge the unacceptable difference in life expectancies among various nations.