

Prevention of Blindness and Deafness News

We have held back the September edition of the newsletter to October - to coincide with World Sight Day, which is held annually on the second Thursday of October to focus attention on the global issue of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. This year, WHO is participating in celebrations in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Rome. There is no global theme for this year's World Sight Day—rather individual organizations are encouraged to use the occasion to highlight their own priority areas. In this newsletter we highlight the issue of chronic eye disease.

Chronic eye disease: the challenge of the 21st Century

The future challenge lies in noncommunicable eye diseases. The number of people suffering from vision loss due to chronic age-related eye diseases is rising as a result of increased life expectancy and population growth. The top three causes of visual impairment are uncorrected refractive errors, cataract and glaucoma. The top three causes of blindness are cataract, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration.

As part of WHO's response to chronic eye disease, the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness Unit hosted a two-day consultation on the public health management of chronic eye diseases last month in WHO, Geneva. A group of international experts in the epidemiology and management of glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration, refractive errors and childhood blindness reviewed the epidemiology and management of these diseases in different income settings. This is the first step in developing a technical series report on chronic eye diseases. The aim is to have the report available in 2012.

For further information please contact Dr Pascolini.

Database on prevention of blindness activities

In collaboration with regional and country offices, we have been working with ministries of health to assess their capacity for tackling blindness and visual impairment. The results will be used to update WHO's current database and highlight future areas for investment.

For more information contact Dr Kocur.

Securing commitment of high-level decision-makers

We are finalizing the results of questionnaires distributed to ministries of health for a report that will highlight ways of securing the commitment of high-level decision-makers for the prevention of blindness.

For more information contact Dr Kocur.

To receive the electronic version of every new issue of the WHO PBD Newsletter, please send a message to WHOPBD@who.int containing the following message text: "subscribe NL."

NEWS FROM WHO/HQ

New Deafness Officer. We have recruited a person to take up this position! We hope the individual will start in December. Further details in the next Newsletter.

IAPB Council of Members meeting

PBD joined the September meeting in Dubai to update members on WHO activities at global and regional levels, and to hear about activities and achievements of VISION 2020 partners. Future opportunities for collaboration were also discussed.

Trachoma

- We are finalising the Procedures for the Certification of Elimination of Trachoma. They are being aligned with the recommendations of the Third Global Scientific Meeting on trachoma earlier this year, the conclusions of the recent Post-Endemic Surveillance meeting, inputs from countries involved in surveillance, and indicators in the Global NTD Atlas. Consultations will take place with selected Member States and WHO Regional Offices before the final version is released.
- The WHO Trachoma Programme Manager manual is being updated following the Third Global Scientific Meeting and the surveillance meetings. The manual will provide guidance for NTD managers. It will outline all aspects of trachoma control. There will be a particular focus on the quality of surgical procedures.
- A new form that WHO will use to collect epidemiological data and information on programme implementation is being finalized. Member States will be asked to use the form when submitting returns for the next WHO-GET 2020 Alliance meeting.

For further information contact Dr Mariotti.

Onchocerciasis

Ouagadougou, 12-16 September 2011: The 33rd session of the Technical Consultative Committee of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) reviewed progress made in onchocerciasis control or elimination activities in 2010 in most of the endemic countries. The Committee highlighted the need for additional efforts for projects in post-conflict countries, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

Nairobi, 20-22 September 2011: The 38th session of the NGDO Coordination Group for Onchocerciasis Control which took place alongside the second session of the NTD NGDO Network agreed to strengthen collaboration with other partners involved in other NTD programmes. This is particularly important with lymphatic filariasis as ivermectin is used for both programmes.

Ouagadougou, 26-30 September 2011: The 8th session of the National Onchocerciasis Task Force from APOC countries reviewed progress in individual countries. The Task Force also discussed country presentations that will be shared at the 17th session of the Joint Action Forum in December 2011 in Kuwait City.

Accra, Ghana, 6-8 October 2011: The 134th session of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies (CSA) took place to review the conclusions and recommendations of CSA Advisory Groups in the following areas: (i) onchocerciasis elimination issues in Africa; (ii) co-implementation of onchocerciasis control/elimination with other health interventions and (iii) the future of APOC.



CSA Meeting

For further information on work HQ is taking forward to tackle onchocerciasis, please contact Dr Ukety.

NEWS FROM AFRO

The work on the eye health component of the Africa Health Observatory database is nearing completion and the database will be piloted using data from selected countries.

Work continues on developing primary eye care indicators to guide future program design, monitoring and evaluations. Dr Mathenge, from AFRO, attended an IAPB-hosted experts meeting in Dubai to take this forward. In addition, there is ongoing work on a set of algorithms and protocols for training primary eye care workers. These will be integrated into wider noncommunicable disease training tools.

NEWS FROM EMRO

Following the recommendations of the regional workshop on integrating and strengthening eye health within primary health care in February 2011 in Dubai, EMRO has been requested by Member States to develop a unified training resource for training primary health care workers and data collection. Two task forces have been identified to take this work forward, one for developing primary eye care training resources, the other for developing tools for data collection and monitoring.

Afghanistan

WHO, in collaboration with the College of Ophthalmology/King Edward Medical University Lahore, Pakistan, is supporting eye care-training programmes in Kabul Noor Eye Hospital, Afghanistan. Ophthalmic Medicine and Surgery Diplomas, Ophthalmology Master of Surgery (MS) and hands-on surgical training will also be provided. The aim is to train 50 ophthalmologists over the next five years.

During September, with the financial support of the Patients Helping Fund Society-State of Kuwait, WHO and the Ministry of Public Health, Afghanistan have been conducting several hundred cataract surgeries, in Kama district, Nangarhar and Chowki district, Kunar.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Two WHO Regional Collaborating Centres have been announced. The first is an Ophthalmic Research Centre in Shahid Beheshti Medical University, Teheran. The Centre will assist WHO in strengthening multidisciplinary policy in eye health and the prevention of blindness throughout the region and support the development of primary eye care training, data collection and monitoring. The second is a Centre for Research and Education on Hearing Loss at the Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Research Centre, University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

Somalia

WHO is currently working with other partners, including the National Eye Center, Mogadishu, the Ministry of Health-Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and Patients Helping Fund Society-State of Kuwait, in undertaking free cataract surgeries for the internally displaced population in Mogadishu and other populations in Somalia. In June, there was a national and international stakeholders meeting to strengthen eye care in Somalia. Also in June collaboration was announced between MoH, Somaliland, University of Hargeisa, Manhal Charity Organization and WHO to develop a training institute for ophthalmology and Allied Vision Sciences at the Manhal Eye Hospital in Hargeisa. The initiative will deliver eye care training and services.



NEWS FROM PAHO/AMRO

Regional events:

First regional trachoma workshop, Bogota (May)
Regional ROP workshop, Buenos Aires (July)

National activities

Argentina: PAHO-MoH national ROP workshop (July).

Belize: MoH launches their national eye care plan (August) and PAHO and MoH host a national workshop to review the implementation of the national program (September).

Colombia: PAHO and MoH discussions on trachoma survey protocols (August).

Guatemala: PAHO-MoH National workshop to produce the national trachoma plan (August).

Jamaica: PAHO-MoH National Workshop on Diabetic Retinopathy (July).

Nicaragua: PAHO-MoH National workshop to review the implementation of the national program (September).

Panama: PAHO-MoH National workshop to review the implementation of the national program (August).

NEWS FROM SEARO

A mid-term review of the National Prevention of Blindness program Nepal was conducted by an expert committee including WHO. Achievements and recommendations for future work were then shared at a workshop in June, where the Minister of Health joined.

WHO has provided technical support to Maldives, India, Indonesia and Myanmar to strengthen the prevention of blindness in the last quarter.

A Regional WHO-IAPB workshop was held between 22-24 September. Eight of 11 countries in SEAR attended.

A situation analysis of prevention of blindness in SEAR is being finalized.

NEWS FROM WPRO

Fiji. Pacific Regional Eye Health Conference and PacEYES Pacific Regional Eye Health Conference in Suva. The aim of the meeting and workshops was to develop a Pacific-wide strategy to develop and implement government-endorsed National Eye Health Plans for each of the 11 participating Pacific Island nations. (June)

China. WPRO attended the National Strategic Planning Workshop for Blindness Prevention Activities in China. Other participants included national and international NGOs, eye hospitals in China, and local and regional government agencies. The workshop discussed current activities and developed priorities for the national prevention of blindness program in 2011 and 2012. (August)

Philippines. Hundreds of participants joined 'Walk for Sight' through Manila. This annual event was organized by the National Committee for Sight Preservation, Department of Health and Lions Clubs International and aims to raise awareness for prevention of blindness. The theme was 'Excellence and Equity in Eye Care - a Human Right'. (August)

Viet Nam. WPRO and the WHO country office attended a stakeholders meeting for programs on elimination of lymphatic filariasis and trachoma, and the control of helminthiasis in 2011-2015. Other participants included government agencies, donors and NGOs. (September)

Laos. WPRO visited Laos meeting with the MoH and the Ophthalmology Centre to discuss collaboration and progress in the national prevention of blindness program. (September)

CONTACTS

For issues published in this newsletter please contact:

HQ: Dr Banatvala, Acting Coordinator (banatvalan@who.int), Dr Kocur (kocuri@who.int), Dr Mariotti (mariottis@who.int), Dr Pascolini (pascolinid@who.int), Dr Ukety (uketyt@who.int)

AFRO: Dr Sambo and Dr Mathenge (sambob@afro.who.int)

EMRO: Dr Choudhury (CPB@emro.who.int)

PAHO/AMRO: Dr Silva (silvajuan@paho.org)

SEARO: Dr Varughese (varugheses@searo.who.int)

WPRO: Dr Mueller (muellera@wpro.who.int)