WHO recent HTA events

In 2012, the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference, recognizing that some of its Member States use the judicial system to ensure access to health technologies without prior evaluation of their effectiveness or comparative assessment, adopted resolution CSP28.R9 to strengthen processes for the assessment and incorporation of health technologies into health systems. Key elements of a comprehensive approach to health technology assessments were identified: use of health technology assessment to inform public policies, establishment of an institutional framework for decision-making based on health technology assessment, strengthening human resource capabilities, promotion of the production of evidence and dissemination of information, rational use of health technologies, and networking to strengthen health technology assessment outcomes, including active participation in the Health Technology Assessment Network of the Americas.

The WHO Global Program of Work 2014-2015, approved by WHA.66 in May 2013, states that the priority of WHO in Health Systems is “the development of tools and guidance to support countries in the prioritization of health technologies through health technology assessment” (...) and that “WHO Headquarters will make recommendations on best practices for supply, reimbursement, and pricing policies for health technologies, enhance global observatories with databases and analysis of data on access to health technologies with financial hardship and barriers to access” (...) and “will develop technical guidelines, formularies, treatment guidelines and protocols, provide a platform for sharing best practices, for the evidence based selection and rational use of essential health technologies and support the development of capacity for health technology assessment.”

During the 10th meeting of Health Technology Assessment international (HTAi) in Seoul, 17–19 June 2013, the Regional Director for the Western Pacific (WPRO), convened a round-table discussion with international experts to discuss the importance of using health technology assessments in achieving universal health coverage and to enhance collaboration between WHO and health technology assessment organizations at global, regional and country levels. Specifically, leadership from WHO was needed for the following actions:

- facilitate the broader use of such assessments in setting priorities through advocacy and raising awareness on the utility of health technology assessments for policy-makers,
- set standards and norms, providing guidance to all Member States on best practices in health technology assessment,
- coordinate and facilitate collaboration between health technology assessment networks and Member States, and
- provide technical support for capacity development in health technology assessment, especially in developing countries.

In July 2013, the Government of Thailand hosted a side meeting at the High-Level Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to discuss health technology assessment as a tool for achieving universal health coverage. Participants concluded that health technology assessment is a tool for achieving universal health coverage and that although it is not a stand-alone solution, it can help to inform priority-setting and choice of health interventions.

In September 2013, the Regional Committee for South-East Asia adopted resolution SEA/RC66/R4 on health intervention and technology assessment in support of universal health coverage, requesting the Regional Director to ascertain the status of health intervention and technology assessment in Member States of the Region; to foster knowledge on health technology assessment among national policymakers and other stakeholders by drawing on lessons from research institutes within and outside the Region; to integrate health intervention and technology assessment concepts and principles into relevant regional strategies, including those on universal
health coverage and the rational use of medicines and health technology; to provide technical support to Member States in order to strengthen appropriate capacity; and to support the exchange of information and capacity-building in health technology assessment and regulation.

The First EMRO Inter-Country Meeting on HTA was held in Hammamet, Tunisia 11-13 November 2013. Comments to presentations from HTA networks and representatives (INAHTA, HTAi and EUROScan), as well plenary discussions and group discussion showed that HTA has produced great enthusiasm, and expectations from HTA to solve Members States health care problems are high. Dr. Ala Alawan, Regional Director of EMRO expressed the States’ willingness to "strengthen their capacities in technology assessment and use HTA networks when new expensive technologies such as diagnostic devices or new vaccines are introduced". However, emphasis was put on the importance of the recognition from health ministries and politicians about the need for HTA as the first crucial step towards implementation.

At the Second WHO Global Forum on Medical Devices entitled ‘Priority Medical Devices for Universal Health Coverage, 22-24 November 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland, three panel sessions and two workshops on HTA took place. These included presentations and discussion of the various HTA networks and what they have achieved as well as presentations of examples of collaboration in doing HTAs together (panels) and issues on capacity building and HTA methodology. The sessions raised a lot of interest and questions on how to be part of networks and benefit from their work and how to initiate a HTA program in a country. Proposals in the sessions included that HTA networks and societies share strategies, tactics, and challenges to encourage uptake and appropriate use of their work by decision makers and to disseminate HTA to all regions.

The Global Forum on medical devices, taking the opportunity of having main stakeholders, i.e. WHO (HQ and RO) and HTA network representatives, gathered in Geneva at WHO on the 22nd of November to organize a follow-up meeting to the WPRO round table discussion on HTA in Seoul in June 2013. The agenda included presentation of stakeholders and WHO on work done on HTA. After the presentation of WHO’s resources in terms of HTA based activities and tools, it became clear that these were almost unknown to most of the HTA leadership present at the meeting. More in depth knowledge about these was desired, and striving for increased visibility with focus on disseminating these resources outside WHO was suggested. Reciprocally, participants from WHO clearly expressed the usefulness of activities, tools, and other initiatives such as mentorship (INAHTA) of the various HTA societies and networks. As HTAi, EuroScan and INAHTA have signed MoUs with each other and with WHO, there was general agreement that mobilizing together all resources to support HTA capacity building and use of HTA in decision making in achieving UHC was the way forward. As in the First Inter-Country meeting in Tunisia, a recurrent theme during the debate was the need for HTA to be fully recognized by policy/decision making as a necessary tool, and if possible, institutionalized. Otherwise any initiative of HTA capacity building or establishing HTA bodies in member states would most likely be in vain. Here, WHO could advocate recognition of HTA and possibly link Ministries in Member States. Furthermore, WHO representatives expressed the need for “success” stories of the impact of HTA as well as fruitful international collaborations to be presented to their members in order to convince decision makers and politicians. In terms of HTA capacity building, it was pinpointed that not all WHO Members States can afford a HTA unit or even have any kind of HTA production, calling for a greater need for utilizing networks. Dr Suwit Wibulpolprasert closed the meeting by pointing out that capacity building for HTA needs to be carried out at three levels, namely at the level of individual researchers and institutes, within networks of HTA agencies and related organizations, and in the political environment in which HTA is institutionalized (see Annex 3 for full report).

Finally, the World Health Assembly (WHA) 67 in May 2014 approved a resolution on Health Interventions and technology assessment in support of universal health coverage. This resolution
urges Member States to consider establishing national systems, work with other stakeholders, and strengthen national capacity for regional and international networking, among other aspects. The secretariat (WHO) has to assess the status of health intervention and technology assessment in Member States, raise awareness, provide technical support to Member States, support the exchange of information among other paragraphs, and to report the progress of the implementation in 2016.