

Malawi introduces of Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

Lilongwe November 2011: A colorful event took place at Masintha ground in Lilongwe, Malawi, on Saturday 12 November 2011, to officially mark the introduction of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV 13) as routine childhood vaccine in Malawi. The occasion was presided over by the Honourable Minister of Health, Dr Jean Kalirani and other distinguished guests included the Representatives from WHO, UNICEF, USAID, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) and the Italian Consulate. The Civil Society groups also attended the function. The launch was an event with two public health themes namely, the introduction of the PCV 13 and the commemoration of the malaria SADC week.

The day was enhanced by entertainment events which included traditional dances, comedies, acrobatics performances and a live music band. The guest of honour arrived at the venue with all the pomp that befitted the event, a motor vehicle float wrapped in PCV13 red colours, a marching group with a banner on PCV13 and a band playing live music, songs for PCV13, and pneumonia. At exactly 10.30 hours (Malawi time) an infant boy became the first child to receive the first shot of PCV 13. As the little boy cried due to the pain from the injection, a new dawn had begun in Malawi more especially for EPI providing hope for a significant reduction in pneumonia and meningitis caused by the pneumococcal bacteria.

In her speech Dr Kalirani mentioned that she was overjoyed that Malawi was making

history in the area of EPI. The Honourable Minister for Health noted that pneumonia, meningitis and otitis media are common diseases among children in Malawi often resulting in severe illnesses and deaths.



The Honourable Minister Health, Dr Jean Kalirani, MP, address the audience at Masintha community ground in Lilongwe

“I recall that with support from GAVI, pneumococcal vaccine was the second vaccine to be introduced in Malawi after Pentavalent vaccine in 2002. In this regard I would like to acknowledge the immense efforts of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization together with the support of WHO, UNICEF and other collaborating partners in ensuring that the children from the least developed countries including our country Malawi now have access and benefit from new and effective vaccines like PCV 13” The Honourable Minister, Dr Kalirani said.

The Honourable Minister mentioned that while different partners and government are putting efforts towards making sure that children are vaccinated, it is disheartening to see that there are still some communities in Malawi that do not allow their children to be vaccinated. She was referring to some families, who due to religious reasons, do not consent to use of vaccinations services. She urged all caregivers and parents to take their

children for vaccination to prevent many of the preventable diseases. She therefore emphasized that the effectiveness of the vaccines to the larger community lies in the large numbers of children vaccinated.



A smiling mother of one of the first Malawian infants to receive PCV 13 vaccine

Dr Jane Muita, UNICEF Deputy Representative speaking on behalf of the GAVI alliance and partners called the day “a memorable day in Malawi’s continuing efforts to reduce child morbidity and mortality.” She mentioned that the GAVI partners were convinced that no economic and social development can take place in a country if immunization lags behind. Immunization enables every child to reach their full physical and intellectual potential.



The Malawi Defense Force team making a colourful display depicting a future Malawi of healthy people

The UNICEF Deputy Representative also paid tribute to the efforts by GAVI to support

countries introduce new vaccines and strengthen immunization services which is consistent with the Global Action Plan for the Prevention of and Control of Pneumonia (GAPP), that is promoted by both WHO and UNICEF.

The Action Plan calls for effective case management at community and health facility level; Increased and sustained high vaccine coverage for pneumonia prevention vaccines (e.g. measles, DPT, and PCV); Improvements of nutrition and reduction of low birth weight including promotion of exclusive breastfeeding; Prevention and control of HIV infection including prevention of Mother – to – Child Transmission of HIV, and control of indoor air pollution.



Dr Zawaira handing over EPI Cold Chain Equipment to the Minister of Health, Dr Jean Kalirani on 11 October 2011



Preceding the launch of the new vaccine, the Ministry of Health and partners through a National Task force for the introduction of

pneumococcal vaccine embarked on various preparatory activities. Training and social mobilization materials were developed for health workers and the general community respectively.

Apart from providing technical assistance, WHO has contributed about \$50,000 towards health workers training activities. On October 11, 2011 Dr Felicitas Zawaira, WR/Malawi, handed over various cold chain equipments to Government of Malawi.

The equipment included 78 refrigerators, 87 large cold boxes and 1,304 vaccine carriers for a total cost of USD 186,836. WHO's contribution to governments' effort to expand the Cold Chain capacity at national and district level especially with the new vaccine is one of its core functions of providing norms and standards in health care delivery.

Malawi has joined a few African countries like Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, South Africa and the Gambia who have introduced this vaccine in the routine EPI schedule.