

WHA48.9 Prevention of hearing impairment

The Forty-eighth World Health Assembly,

Recalling resolution WHA38.19 on prevention of hearing impairment and deafness, and WHA42.28 on disability prevention and rehabilitation;

Concerned at the growing problem of largely preventable hearing impairment in the world, where at present 120 million people are estimated to have disabling hearing difficulties;

Recognizing that severe hearing impairment in children constitutes a particularly serious obstacle to optimal development and education, including language acquisition, and that hearing difficulties leading to communication problems are a major subject of concern in the elderly and thus one of growing worldwide importance in view of the aging of populations;

Aware of the significant public health aspects of avoidable hearing loss, related to causes such as congenital disorders and infectious diseases, as well as use of ototoxic drugs and exposure to excessive noise;

Noting the persistent inadequacy of resources for hearing impairment prevention, despite the increasing commitment of international nongovernmental organizations,

1. URGES Member States:

(1) to prepare national plans for the prevention and control of major causes of avoidable hearing loss, and for early detection in babies, toddlers, and children, as well as in the elderly, within the framework of primary health care;

(2) to take advantage of existing guidelines and regulations or to introduce appropriate legislation for the proper management of particularly important causes of deafness and hearing impairment, such as otitis media, use of ototoxic drugs and harmful exposure to noise, including noise in the work environment and loud music;

(3) to ensure the highest possible coverage of childhood immunization against the target diseases of the Expanded Programme on Immunization and against mumps, rubella and (meningococcal) meningitis whenever possible;

(4) to consider the setting-up of mechanisms for collaboration with nongovernmental or other organizations for support to, and coordination of, action to prevent hearing impairment at country level, including the detection of hereditary factors, by genetic counselling;

(5) to ensure appropriate public information and education for hearing protection and conservation in particularly vulnerable or exposed population groups;

2. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to further technical cooperation in the prevention of hearing impairments, including the development of appropriate technical guidelines;

(2) to cooperate with countries in the assessment of hearing loss as a public health problem;

(3) to support, to the extent that resources are available, the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures in countries to prevent hearing impairment;

(4) to develop further collaboration and coordination with nongovernmental and other

interested organizations and institutions;

(5) to promote and support, to the extent feasible, applied and operations research for the optimal prevention and treatment of major causes of hearing impairment;

(6) to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to strengthen technical cooperation in hearing impairment prevention, including possible support from organizations concerned;

(7) to keep the Executive Board and the Health Assembly informed of progress, as appropriate.

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