IV Prevention of road traffic injuries

A. BACKGROUND

Road traffic injuries are a leading cause of death by injury, killing nearly 1.2 million people annually. Approximately 90% of these deaths occur in developing countries, mostly among people who will never be able to afford a car – pedestrians, cyclists, and users of public transportation. Those injured in this way in developing countries are at higher risk of death or long-term disability than their counterparts in developed countries. Estimates suggest that the economic costs of road traffic injuries amount to $100 billion, twice the annual development assistance to developing countries. Road traffic injuries can, however, be prevented. A number of strategies and policies have contributed to dramatic decreases in road crashes in developed countries. These have focused on such things as safety devices – including seat belts, car seats, and helmets; laws relating to alcohol consumption and the enforcement of these laws; speeding; and road design. The challenge is to adapt and apply these strategies – or else create new strategies – for developing countries, particularly those where road traffic fatalities are increasing at alarming rates.

B. THE RESPONSE OF WHO

In recent years, indications that road traffic injuries are rising sharply, particularly in developing countries, have given WHO a new impetus to address this major public health concern. The WHO Director-General has recently announced that the annual World Health Day in 2004 will be dedicated to “Road Safety.” This will provide an ideal venue for the global launch of the World report on road traffic injury prevention that WHO
is currently preparing with the World Bank. Although efforts on road traffic injuries have been rather sporadic since the World Health Assembly called on WHO to act on the problem in 1974, there is no doubt of WHO’s renewed determination to address the issue.

C. THE FIVE-YEAR WHO STRATEGY FOR ROAD TRAFFIC INJURY PREVENTION

The first tangible outcome of this renewed commitment was the production of the *Five-year WHO strategy for road traffic injury prevention*. Developed in 2001 in collaboration with experts from health, transport and policing, as well as from NGOs and the private sector, the document covers the areas of epidemiology, prevention and advocacy. It outlines a strategy for building capacity at local and national levels to monitor the burden of road traffic injuries; for incorporating road traffic injury prevention and control into national public health agendas; and for promoting action-oriented policies and programmes so as to prevent road traffic injuries.

D. IMPLEMENTING THE FIVE-YEAR WHO STRATEGY FOR ROAD TRAFFIC INJURY PREVENTION

1. Documenting good practice in road traffic injury prevention

In order to identify effective and cost-effective strategies for preventing road traffic injuries, VIP has commissioned the Cochrane Injuries Group to conduct a systematic review of existing good practice in this area. The Cochrane Injuries Group, based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, is an international network whose task is to prepare, maintain and promote high-quality, peer-reviewed systematic reviews. The *Manual of good practice in road traffic injury prevention* will identify interventions in this field which have been proved to be effective, as well as those which are promising but warrant further evaluation. The manual, to be available in late 2003, will serve as a resource for policy makers and practitioners involved in the prevention of road traffic accidents.

“This must never happen again.”

Coroner: London, UK, at the inquest of the world’s first road fatality, Mrs Bridget Driscoll, a 44-year-old mother of two, and a pedestrian killed on the grounds of the Crystal Palace in London, 17 August 1896
2. Building capacity in road traffic injury prevention

VIP and one of its Collaborating Centres, the Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme in New Delhi, India, are developing the *Training manual for road traffic injury prevention*. This is a tool to help professionals from developing countries design and implement prevention policies and programmes. The end product will also serve as the basis for one of the modules of the TEACH-VIP training project described below. The manual will include chapters on the following aspects of road traffic injury prevention: concepts and terminology; the magnitude, burden, and determinants of road traffic injuries; the evidence base; planning and implementing interventions; first aid, pre-hospital and hospital care; institutions, networks and partnerships; and prevention policies and programmes. After being peer-reviewed and revised, the manual will be made available for distribution in late 2003.

E. PARTNERSHIPS

VIP is involved with a host of partners in its work on preventing road traffic injuries. The production of the *World report on road traffic injury prevention* is a joint WHO/World Bank initiative. Other major partners in this effort include the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile Foundation; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA; the Global Road Safety Partnership; the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, USA; and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. To help implement the *Five-year WHO strategy for road traffic injury prevention*, VIP is receiving support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA, the Global Forum for Health Research, and victims’ organizations, including the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims. VIP represents WHO as a member of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s Traffic Safety Committee, which will hold its European Road Safety Week to coincide with World Health Day 2004, as described below.

F. TECHNICAL COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES

Apart from the partner organizations mentioned above, VIP is collaborating with a number of countries to help implement the *Five-year WHO strategy for road traffic injury prevention*. Such efforts are currently under way in five countries: Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mexico, Poland and Viet Nam. From each of these countries, VIP has received project proposals from their Ministries of Health, requesting support for collaboration on data
collection, developing national policies and programmes, strengthening institutions and building human resource capacities in the area of road traffic injury prevention. These projects will be operational in early 2003.

G. NEXT STEPS IN ROAD TRAFFIC INJURY PREVENTION

The year 2004 will be the year for road traffic injury prevention. WHO is planning two major initiatives related to its work in this area – World Health Day 2004 on “Road Safety” and the *World report on road traffic injury prevention*. World Health Day is held every year on 7 April to mark the date of the establishment of WHO. Through World Health Day, WHO leads a general public debate on a health issue that is known, but often neglected. “Road Safety” aims to draw global attention to the growing but preventable burden of road traffic injuries; to campaign for visible and sustained action in research, policy, programmes, and funding; to place road traffic injury prevention high on the agendas of governments and their development partners; and to build partnerships for road traffic injury prevention. World Health Day 2004 on “Road Safety” will also be the date of the launch of the WHO–World Bank *World report on road traffic injury prevention*. This report was begun in 2002. It will be the first global multisectoral scientific assessment of road traffic injuries, their magnitude and consequences, and the strategies for preventing them. The report will be an invaluable tool for policy and decision makers in ministries of health, transport, national planning and local government and their partners at country level.