

## **Scottish Government Leads the Way in Tackling Viral Hepatitis Epidemic**

**Switzerland, Geneva. Thursday 18 September, 2008** – Today the Scottish Government became the first government worldwide to promise to implement the World Hepatitis Alliance’s chronic viral hepatitis ‘12 Asks’.

The ‘12 Asks for 2012’ are a series of requests from more than 200 patient groups all over the world for governments to commit to measures to tackle viral hepatitis B and C. In Scotland, the ‘12 Asks’ are largely focused on combating hepatitis C, reflecting the levels of infection across the country. There are an estimated 50,000 people living with hepatitis C in Scotland and around 500 million people (one in 12) infected with hepatitis B or C worldwide.

Minister for Public Health, Shona Robison MSP, said the Scottish Government welcomed the World Hepatitis Alliance’s ‘12 Asks for 2012’ programme as a global force for real change in tackling hepatitis B and C. Ms Robison said “The Scottish Government has a strong commitment to improving health outcomes for people living with hepatitis C and in May 2008 we launched the second phase of our Hepatitis C Action Plan with a £43 million investment over three years.”

Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance, congratulated the Scottish Government on being a world leader, saying “I am delighted that the Scottish Government is the first to sign up to the ‘12 Asks’ and I hope other governments will soon follow. The only way to win the fight against viral hepatitis is for governments to take action to improve awareness, diagnosis, treatment and care. World governments can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to this forgotten, ignored and stigmatised killer.”

Bo’ness resident and hepatitis C patient Petra Wright was diagnosed in 2004 after living with the disease for 25 years. Petra is delighted that the Scottish Government is leading the way internationally in tackling hepatitis C, explaining “This announcement makes me proud to be Scottish. Viral hepatitis has been stigmatised and ignored by governments all over the world for too long, even though hepatitis B and C kill 1.5 million people per year. It means a lot to me that the Scottish Government is at the forefront of this global campaign to save patients’ lives.

“Now people who have been at risk need to come forward for testing, and people who have been diagnosed need to come forward for treatment. GPs will play a crucial role in this and need more training to help them diagnose more people and save more lives.”

## Press Release

Dr John Dillon, Consultant Hepatologist at Ninewells Hospital, Scotland, who was heavily involved in the development of the second phase Scottish Hepatitis C Action Plan, said “While pledges are important, they must be supported by a significant and timely financial investment. In Scotland we now have a fully-funded Action Plan, but there is still much to do to put it into practice so that it delivers real change.”

### 12 Asks for 2012

Six of the ‘12 Asks for 2012’ are universal goals and six are tailored to the needs of each country involved in the campaign. The ‘12 Asks for 2012’ to which the Scottish Government agreed are:

1. Public recognition of chronic viral hepatitis as an urgent public health issue
2. The appointment of an individual to lead Government strategy nationally
3. The development of a patient pathway for screening, diagnosis, referral and treatment
4. Clear, quantifiable targets for reducing incidence and prevalence
5. Clear, quantifiable targets for reducing mortality
6. Clear, quantifiable targets for screening
7. Effective surveillance and publication of national incidence and prevalence statistics
8. Commitment to tackle health inequalities in access to services
9. Commitment to partner with patient groups in national policy design and implementation
10. Provision of free and confidential testing
11. An ongoing national public awareness campaign that alerts people to the issue and is committed to reducing stigma
12. Implementation of an effective national vaccination programme

### Did You Know?

- 500 million people worldwide are currently infected with hepatitis B or C
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS
- Between them, hepatitis B and C kill 1.5 million people a year<sup>1,2</sup>
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses
- Most of the 500 million infected do not know

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Hepatitis B Fact Sheet:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/index.html> (accessed July 17, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Initiative for Vaccine Research, Viral Cancers, Hepatitis C. World Health Organization, 2006.

[http://www.who.int/vaccine\\_research/diseases/viral\\_cancers/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/vaccine_research/diseases/viral_cancers/en/index2.html) (accessed July 17, 2008)

## Press Release

- 50,000 people in Scotland have been infected with the hepatitis C virus<sup>3</sup>
- Over 38,000 people in Scotland are chronic carriers<sup>4</sup>
- Phase II Hepatitis C Action Plan launched in Scotland on World Hepatitis Day 2008<sup>5</sup>

### World Hepatitis Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance is a newly established Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 200 hepatitis B and C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board of patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, North America, South America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For further information visit [www.worldhepatitisday.com](http://www.worldhepatitisday.com).

### World Hepatitis Day

The first ever World Hepatitis Day was observed on Monday 19 May, 2008, and marked a brand new, entirely patient-led initiative. The day was launched in response to the concern that chronic viral hepatitis has nowhere near the level of awareness nor the political will to tackle it that is seen in HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. This is despite the fact that the numbers chronically infected with, and annually killed by, hepatitis B and C viruses are on the same scale.

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<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson SJ, Roy KM, Wadd S, Bird SM, Taylor A, Anderson E, et al. Hepatitis C virus infection in Scotland: epidemiological review and public health challenges. *Scott Med J* 2006;51(2):8-15.

<sup>4</sup> Needs assessment of Hepatitis C testing, treatment, care and support services in Scotland: Overview report. Glasgow: Health Protection Scotland; 2008. Available from: <http://www.hepcscotland.co.uk> (accessed July 17, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> The Scottish Government. Hepatitis C Action Plan for Scotland: Phase II: May 2008 - March 2011: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/13103055/0> (accessed July 17, 2008)