Press Release

World Hepatitis Alliance Applauds WHO Decision on Viral Hepatitis

WHO Executive Board recommends action to support the 500 million people living with hepatitis B and C

Switzerland, Geneva. Tuesday 26 January, 2010 – The World Hepatitis Alliance today welcomed the decision by the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board to recommend a resolution on viral hepatitis to the World Health Assembly in May. If adopted, the resolution would for the first time provide a robust framework for international action to prevent, diagnose and treat hepatitis B and C.

The 34 country WHO Executive Board members reached consensus on a resolution which recognises the impact of viral hepatitis. Proposed by Brazil and co-sponsored by Indonesia and Colombia, it gives global support to an official World Hepatitis Day to provide a focus for national and international awareness-raising efforts.

Following the announcement of the decision, Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance said, "This is what we need. The Executive Board have acknowledged not only that viral hepatitis is a major international public health threat but also that it needs to be tackled globally. "This is a vital first step in changing the lives of 500 million people living with chronic hepatitis B or C and also preventing countless new infections. Adoption of the resolution by the World Health Assembly in May will be a clear statement that viral hepatitis now has the same priority as the other major world diseases."

Chronic viral hepatitis B and C affect one in 12 people globally and approximately one person dies every 30 seconds. Since the hepatitis B and C viruses were first discovered in 1967 and 1988 respectively, there has not been a single WHO resolution that fully addresses the challenges of the global epidemic.

"In an interconnected world, preventive measures to control viral hepatitis must be coordinated on a global scale" explained Dr. Michael Houghton, co-discoverer of the hepatitis C virus and member of the World Hepatitis Alliance Public Health Panel. "This important resolution is long overdue and if adopted will provide the policy changes needed to ensure a collective international response to these diseases."

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The resolution will be debated by the 193 WHO Member States at the 63rd World Health Assembly, due to take place in Geneva from Monday 17 May – Friday 21 May, 2010.

Did You Know?

- Approximately 500 million people worldwide are currently infected with hepatitis B or C[1]
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS[2]
- Between them, hepatitis B and C kill one million people a year[1]
- 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

World Hepatitis Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance provides global leadership and supports action that will halt the death toll and improve the lives of people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C. Through better awareness, prevention, care, support and access to treatment, our ultimate goal is to work with governments to eradicate these diseases from the planet.

The World Hepatitis Alliance is a Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 280 hepatitis B and C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board elected by patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, North America, Latin America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For further information visit: www.worldhepatitisalliance.org

World Hepatitis Alliance – Seeking a world without viral hepatitis B and C.

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[2] World Health Organization. Global summary of the AIDS epidemic. http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/JC1700_Epi_Update_2009_en.pdf (accessed 25 January, 2010)