

PRESS RELEASE

WORLD HEPATITIS DAY 2020

World Hepatitis Day: Health Experts Identify Major Disruptions to Hepatitis Elimination Efforts Caused by Covid-19 – But They Also See Opportunities

Singapore (28 July 2020) – On 24 July 2020, the Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) co-hosted a webinar with Burnet Institute, in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region and WHO South East Asia Region, inviting health experts to discuss how people living with hepatitis, and the services they access, are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the implications this may have on the goal to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

It is now just over a decade since 28 July was designated as World Hepatitis Day by the WHO. Each year, the health sector comes together to bring worldwide attention to the huge unmet need in the area of viral hepatitis, to share work experiences of those living and combatting the virus, and identify what still needs to be done to achieve the goal of eliminating viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

This year, however, we come together on a World Hepatitis Day like no other, with the Covid-19 pandemic having thrown us new scenarios and challenges that impact the lives of people working and living with hepatitis in many ways. Last week's webinar, titled *#HepFree Future in Asia and Pacific: Hepatitis elimination in the time of Covid-19*, heard from various speakers from the region who presented perspectives from a range of countries including Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia.

CEVHAP Co-chair, Professor Rosmawati Mohamed of the University of Malaya, presented results of the World Health Organization survey "Disruption in HIV, Hepatitis and STI services due to Covid-19" carried out by from April to June 2020, noting the highest levels of disruption being reported in the Western Pacific Region. These disruptions included:

- Diversion of health services to combat Covid-19
- Travel and transport restrictions limiting access to hepatitis services
- Reductions on continuity of hepatitis treatment
- Drug stock outages

An alarming reduction in cancer services was also highlighted, with 80% of countries reporting disruption occurring in services for cancer and other non-communicable diseases with disruption being highest in countries with the most severe transmission phase of Covid-19. With implications for the longer-term development of new therapies, a significant reduction of an average of 65% in enrolment in clinical trials has been observed causing some trials to be suspended or abandoned altogether.

However, while many disruptions were reported by speakers, there was also a number of potential opportunities noted that could assist the hepatitis elimination effort as a result of the extensive changes and innovations occurring in healthcare systems due to Covid-19.

Professor Mohamed said, “There are some positives that may come from this pandemic for example, a number of governments are using multi-month dispensing (3-6 month) and changing community delivery services, offering benefits over the long term and at the same time promote innovation in people-centred service delivery.”

Associate Professor Joe Doyle of the Burnet Institute spoke of the further challenges facing vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups in the community and expressed the view that the current pandemic presents us with a number of solutions and opportunities. These include the opportunity now for us to focus on patient-centred healthcare, with Professor Doyle saying that “new models of outreach to deal with Covid-19 really should also be applied to hepatitis.”

“As society, as human beings, we now understand that health is a public good and health is truly important for social and economic development. Universal Health Care (UHC) is now more important than ever.”

Dr Polin Chan
Hepatitis Lead, HIV/Hepatitis/STI Unit
Division of Disease Control
WHO Western Pacific Regional Office Manila, Philippines

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Resources:

- Recording of the webinar “#HepFree Future in Asia and Pacific: Hepatitis elimination in the time of COVID-19” (July 24, 2020): [Link to video](#)
- World Health Organization survey “Disruption in HIV, Hepatitis and STI services due to COVID-19” (July 8, 2020): [Link to report](#)

About CEVHAP:

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is an independent, multidisciplinary body to advocate for public policy reform to reduce the burden of and ultimately eradicate viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

Incorporated in October 2010, CEVHAP membership is comprised of many world-renowned hepatitis experts, academics, healthcare workers, people living with the infections and their carers. CEVHAP utilizes the collective expertise of its members through partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies in public policy formulation and health education. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org

**WEBINAR: #HepFree Future in Asia and Pacific:
Hepatitis elimination in the time of COVID-19**

Hosted By: Burnet Institute, CEVHAP with Supporting Partner WHO (WPRO & SEARO)

Date: Friday, July 24, 2020

Time: 11:00am (GMT +5:00), Karachi

11:30am (GMT +5:30), New Delhi

2:00pm (GMT +8), Manila / Singapore / Kuala Lumpur

4:00pm (GMT +10), Melbourne

6:00pm (GMT +12), Wellington/Suva

Co-Chairs: Margaret Hellard and Saeed Hamid

Agenda

1. Access to hepatitis care:

- Impact of COVID-19 on screening, cancer treatment, clinical trials, research - (Ros Mohamed)
- Harm Reduction / Reaching vulnerable communities? Connecting peer-to-peer: Virtual platforms / telemedicine; How to outreach during a lockdown - challenges and solutions amidst lockdowns – (Joe Doyle)
- Crashing through the Roadblocks: with or without Covid our hepatitis B and hepatitis C elimination stands and we should get it done!! – (Giten Khwairakpam)

2. What's happening in the hepatitis world amidst the COVID-19 pandemic? (40 mins)

- Brief overview of new guidelines from WHO including antiviral use to prevent mother to child transmission of hepatitis B. This presentation will touch upon COVID-19 and WHO operation guidelines on continuity of services, including hepatitis, and community care and the new HBV guidelines to be officially released on 28th July with the global virtual event. (Po-Lin Chan)
- COVID-19 impact on hepatitis care: country experiences
 - a. Pakistan - (Syeda Zahida)
 - b. Indonesia - (Wiendra Waworuntu)
 - c. China – (Qin Ning)
 - d. Vietnam – (Hang Dao)

3. Panel discussions: literacy on COVID-19 & hepatitis (clinicians & community) –

Moderated discussions and questions from attendees to touch on:

- How does COVID-19 affect people living with hepatitis B and C?
- What if I am cirrhotic?
- Liver cancer and COVID-19?
- Stigma & COVID-19

- How do we live with the the ‘new normal’ for hepatitis care: more importance on health and treatment literacy (patient self-management);
- Importance of new technology such as POC self-testing kits eg HIV-self testing, HCV-self testing (we don’t have HBV self-testing); what new technology is needed?
- What ways of working with community are needed?
- Finding the missing millions just got tougher – how to respond?
- Living with uncertainty - what about mental health among PLW Hepatitis?

Panellists: Jack Wallace, Syeda Zahida, Po-lin Chan, B B Rewari, Cary James

SPEAKERS

Prof Margaret Hellard (Co-chair)
Burnet Institute
Melbourne

Dr Wiendra Waworuntu
Ministry of Health
Jakarta

Prof Saeed Hamid (Co-chair)
Aga Khan University
Karachi

Prof QinNing
Huazhong University of
Science and Technology
Wuhan

Prof Rosmawati Mohamed
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur

Dr Hang Dao
Hanoi Medical University
Hanoi

Assoc Prof Joseph Doyle
Burnet Institute
Melbourne

Dr Jack Wallace
Burnet Institute
Melbourne

Mr Giten Khwairakpam
TREAT Asia
Bangkok

Dr B B Rewari
WHO South East Asia Region
New Delhi

Dr Polin Chan
WHO Western Pacific Region
Manila

Mr Cary James
World Hepatitis Alliance
Geneva

Dr Syeda Zahida
Ministry of Health
Lahore