

Partnership launched to tackle cervical cancer in Africa

Brazzaville/Kigali, 11 May 2016 – Ongoing efforts to prevent and control cervical cancer in the African Region have received a significant boost following the announcement of a pioneering partnership between the World Health Organization African Region (WHO AFRO) and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA).

The new partnership, “AFRO Comprehensive Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Initiative”, will work across the African Region to improve awareness; help empower women and healthcare professionals to improve prevention, screening and treatment rates of breast and cervical cancers.

“There are many obstacles to cervical cancer screening in resource-constrained countries, generally attributed to the lack of infrastructure as well as technical, medical and financial resources, and a lack of awareness and education on cervical cancer among women and healthcare providers,” explains Dr Abdikamal Alislad, Acting Director, Non-Communicable Diseases, at WHO Regional Office for Africa. *“Many lives can be saved if public awareness is strengthened on the importance of testing and early treatment,”* he added.

Cancer is an emerging public health problem throughout the African Region; and breast and cervical cancers are among the most common cancers affecting women. In sub-Saharan Africa, the incidence of cervical cancer and breast cancer is no higher than in other parts of the world, but the risk of death among women with either disease is much higher than in high-income countries – eight times higher in the case of cervical cancer. This is because too many African women are diagnosed too late which hampers effective treatment and care. In sub-Saharan Africa, 22.5 per 100,000 women die from cervical cancer, compared to 2.5 per 100,000 women in North America.

Supported by some funding and in-kind contributions from IFPMA, the partnership will implement cancer prevention and control activities in four countries with a high burden of cervical cancer: Cameroon, Uganda, Swaziland and Zambia, in collaboration with the respective ministries of health. In addition, the partnership will work with healthcare providers to improve their knowledge about screening strategies.

“Partnerships are the way forward when dealing with complex challenges such as those posed by noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Working across sectors enables partners to generate health outcomes that are transformational, hence sustainable. We are delighted to support WHO AFRO in implementing strategies that help alleviate the NCD burden in low- and middle-income countries,” says Eduardo Pisani, Director General, IFPMA. He adds, *“IFPMA has been pioneering sector-wide partnerships that address prevention of NCDs for a number of years now, working with a wide range of partners including the PAHO Foundation, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, The International Telecommunication Union, and The World Health Professions Alliance”.*

Commenting on the need to strengthen public-private partnerships such as this one, Dr Bente Mikkelsen, Head Secretariat of the WHO Global Coordinating Mechanism on NCDs (GCM/NCD at WHO HQ Geneva) at WHO HQ in Geneva said: *“There is an urgent need to scale up the multiple contributions from the diverse range of private sector entities for the prevention and control of NCDs at national level, while effectively safeguarding public health interests from undue influence by any form of real, perceived or potential conflict of interest. This is a concrete example of how governments can work with the private sector to realize their commitments on NCDs, as outlined and promised through high-level political declarations.”*

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About WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO):

WHO AFRO is one of the six regions of WHO whose mission is the attainment by all peoples of the highest level of health across Sub-Saharan Africa. The Organization's presence in the region consists of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, a Secretariat for the African Region, three Inter-country Support Teams (ISTs), WHO Country Offices located in 47 Member States, and a Liaison Office for the AU and ECA located in Addis Ababa. For more information on WHO AFRO and health in the African Region, please visit <http://www.afro.who.int>

About the IFPMA:

IFPMA represents the research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations across the globe. The research-based pharmaceutical industry's 1.3 million employees research, develop and provide medicines and vaccines that improve the lives of patients worldwide. Based in Geneva, IFPMA has official relations with the United Nations and contributes industry expertise to help the global health community find solutions that improve global health. For more information regarding IFPMA please visit www.ifpma.org

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