



## 75th World Health Assembly Highlights

(Source: WHO Daily Update Press Releases)

The WHO kicked off the 75th annual World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland with the re-election of Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as WHO Director General. Delegates also agreed to a landmark decision of sustainable financing for WHO with the adoption of a series of recommendations from a Sustainable Financing Working Group made up of WHO member states.

These recommendations are designed to make WHO's funding more predictable and flexible, and less dependent on voluntary contributions. It was also recommended to the Secretariat that budget proposals be developed for an increase in assessed contributions to 50% of its core budget by 2030. In the last budget cycle, assessed contributions made up only 16% of the approved Programme Budget.

The Working Group on International Health Regulations submitted to delegates a final report on strengthening WHO preparedness and response to health emergencies. The working group will concentrate its continued work on putting forth potential amendments to IHR (2005). An IHR Review Committee will also make technical recommendations on the proposed amendments that would be submitted. The proposed package of targeted amendments for consideration would be submitted by the 77th Health Assembly.

Day two of the program included a resolution calling for better funding, planning, cooperation, and a better overall understanding and focus on unique issues faced by populations residing in cities and urban areas, resulting in better preparedness when responding to health emergencies. Cities are uniquely vulnerable, due to population density, the movement of people in and out of these regions, and the vulnerability of some communities themselves.

Delegates also passed a resolution for improving clinical trial capabilities in all countries, as an aspect of strengthening countries' health systems. The resolution calls for greater efficiency, funding, timely data and results sharing, improved public-private collaboration and better coordination, as well as stronger regulatory and ethical frameworks.

On Day 3 of the program, delegates overwhelmingly agreed to a resolution on the "Health emergency in Ukraine and refugee receiving and hosting countries. The resolution brings attention to the direct and indirect health impacts in Ukraine, in the region and beyond, and condemns attacks on health care, as documented by WHO's Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. It also urges the Russian Federation to immediately cease any attacks on hospitals and other health care facilities.

The director-general also renewed the mandates of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO for two years. The Committee, created in 2016, provides oversight and monitoring of the development and performance of the WHO Emergencies Programme, and guides the Programme's activities. Recommendations from this year's report were well-received by the Delegates, who encouraged their adoption.

Day four of the assembly program saw a record number of recommendation approvals by delegates relating to non-communicable diseases such as cancers, diabetes, heart and lung diseases and mental health, along with their risk factors. This comes ahead of the 4th UN General Assembly high-level meeting on the prevention and control of

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- ◆ **The Merck Foundation, Merck KGaA's** philanthropic arm, has launched a new TV program in Africa that is 30 minutes long, and features public figures in African fashion, art and more. The program is designed to "be the voice of the voiceless and break the silence about many critical and sensitive social and health issues in Africa." The program uses a presenter-guest format and will hopefully promulgate conversation about significant issues such as treating diabetes, ending child marriage, supporting education for girls and breaking the stigma surrounding infertility, as well as other issues facing African communities.

- ◆ The Biden Administration announced that **US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)** and **Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance** have partnered to create the **COVAX Rapid Financing Facility**, which will provide up to US\$ 1 billion to accelerate COVID-19 vaccine and ancillary supply purchase and delivery on behalf of developing countries participating in the **COVAX Advance Market Commitment (COVAX AMC)**. The aim of this new innovative financing instrument is to allow Gavi to monetize sovereign and private sector pledges to the COVAX AMC and consequently maximize impact by minimizing waiting time for the funding. This tool will give the COVAX AMC additional liquidity to support the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, including variant-adapted doses, in response to risks and shocks, and it will enable COVAX to act quickly to secure access to extra doses.

- ◆ According to research published by **Natural Medicine**, COVID vaccines, while effective in preventing hospitalization and death, offer little protection against long COVID symptoms. Compared to an unvaccinated individual, the risk of long COVID in a fully vaccinated individual was cut only by 15%, according to the study.

- ◆ Africa has finally acquired enough COVID vaccines for African populations. However, it has become increasingly difficult to convince

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## Leveraging Technology to Combat Substandard and Falsified Meds in Africa

(Source: An article by Chimezie Anyakora and Ofure Odibeli for Business Day)

The proliferation of substandard and falsified (SF) medicines has remained a global challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, much like those located in Africa. Part of the ongoing problem is a limited supply chain which undermines progress towards meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Other factors such as inadequate resource allocation, lacking routine quality control and poor supply chain management increase the difficulty in combatting SF medicines in Africa, as compared to other more developed countries.

According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 10 medical products in these developing countries is substandard or falsified. Using these SF medicines has both health and economic consequences for the continent.

SF medicines result in treatment failures, adverse reactions, unnecessary deaths and overall reduction in confidence in the health system. Use of SF medicines is also a contributing factor in an increase in antimicrobial resistance, along with a general wasting of critical

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NCDs which is scheduled for 2025, with a goal of accelerating progress towards globally agreed NCD and SDG targets. Measures to reduce deaths from NCDs include a new implementation roadmap aimed to help member states speed up action to support their populations and achieve NCD-related targets, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The last day of the 75th World Health Assembly included a request by member states to the Secretariat to continue the integration of information related to terms, codes, and definitions of existing systems for naming medical devices and making them available to member states through its Medical Devices Information System (MEDEVIS). The process will advance the management of medical devices with the goal of enhancing access to medical devices. This will assist in emergency preparedness and response along with improving patient safety and quality of health care.

The World Health Assembly also approved the “Global Strategy on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)” through a resolution that aims to position IPC as central to infectious hazard and health emergency and preparedness response, as well as address the silent burden of health care associated infections and antimicrobial resistance. The resolution provides 13 recommendations to member states that are aimed at keeping people safe and includes components such as including IPC in global health emergency preparedness, prevention, and response, ensuring sustainable IPC programmes and infrastructures/resources at the national, sub-national and health care facility level in all countries.

During the final session of the World Health Assembly, member states noted with appreciation new Global Health Strategies for HIV, viral hepatitis, and sexually transmitted infections for the period of 2022-2030. These strategies will help reignite momentum in the responses to these diseases that have suffered setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. They will also strengthen responses to specific diseases while integrating them into broader health frameworks to increase impact by addressing aspects of the diseases jointly.

The strategies call for more precise focus on those most affected and most at risk, while also addressing inequities. They also promote synergies under a universal health coverage and primary health care framework, and outline actions to identify and manage future outbreaks of HIV, viral hepatitis and other sexually transmitted infections, and other emerging health threats.

## Leveraging Technology (cont.)...

resources.

The ongoing rise in these SF medicines demands a reliable, fast, and effective method for identifying poor-quality medicines throughout the supply chain. Therefore, Africa must work diligently toward innovative solutions that are practical and sustainable in combatting SF medicines. Leveraging global advancements in technology can provide a viable solution.

Technology plays a significant role in developing innovative applications that are designed to provide efficient and reliable processing of information as well as dissemination of alerts to appropriate individuals and agencies. Common applications such as medicine authentication tools (MATs) involve verification of product packaging. Health tech companies like mPedigree, Sproxil and PharmaSecure have developed mobile apps and SMS-based MATs for detecting falsified medicines through the use of visible or scratchable codes printed on product packaging by the manufacturer. The patient can then send this code to an authentication database using SMS. In reply, a message is received stating whether the product in question is genuine or fake. Scannable bar

codes are also used to prove authenticity.

Poor network connectivity can be a significant drawback to these MATs, which can be discouraging for patients due to delayed responses. Another challenge is that full payment is required before gaining the right to authenticate the product. Despite these obstacles, MATs have gained popularity.

Screening technologies are also invaluable tools for post-marketing surveillance/authentication of medicine quality, as they can be deployed in the field. The ability to screen products in the field also employs significantly less resources than those of traditional QC confirmatory technologies.

These field kits use machine learning to identify and quantify a drug product based on its chemical nature or a unique fingerprint derived from drug interaction analysis. They offer national medicine regulatory authorities and other related agencies fast and reliable means of detecting SF medicines so that they can be removed from the supply chain. Likewise these essential tools also allow pharmacists to confirm authenticity, which is particularly important in that it is pharmacists that connect producers and distributors to consumers.

The march towards globalization has created ever-increasing complexities in our ability to provide quality medicines, as demonstrated in the proliferation of SF medicines. Leveraging technology to provide affordable, easy-to-use, and portable tools to address this global healthcare challenge is critical to achieving medicine security in Africa and progressing towards meeting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

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individuals in-country to get the vaccination. This spirit of resistance has been brought on by rumors about health risks related to the vaccine, a general distrust in Western countries sending the vaccine, and local religious leaders promoting cultural and racial mistrust.

- ◆ The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** staged 130 counterfeit drug busting operations between 2016 and 2021, according to a new report published by the *Annals of Pharmacotherapy*. The agency's efforts involve arrests, product confiscations and the breakup of counterfeit drug rings. About 65% of the FDA's enforcement actions are centered around fake products sold over the internet. In approximately 85% of these operations, patients could obtain counterfeit drugs (often controlled substances such as opioids, stimulants, and benzodiazepines) without a prescription.

- ◆ According to the latest analysis from the **U.S. Pharmacopeia's Medicine Vulnerability Insights Series** and its *Medicine Supply Map*, antibiotics are 42% more likely to be in shortage compared to all other drugs. The **World Health Organization** has designated antimicrobial resistance as one of the top 10 global health threats facing humanity. Antimicrobial resistance means fewer medications to select from to help patients. Shortages of the critical antibiotics contribute to continued emergence and exacerbation of antimicrobial resistance.

- ◆ A new outbreak of monkeypox has spread to more than a dozen countries. Cases of the current outbreak number in the hundreds, and has fueled more infection fears to a world that is just recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Monkeypox has been known since the 1950s and can be common in rodents. The disease most often spreads to human through contact with disease lesions or through exhaled respiratory droplets during prolonged close contact.

(Sources: Digital Journal, FiercePharma, NBC News, Politico, and Press Releases)