

# Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching global patient safety 'challenge'

29 March 2017 – Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching new global patient safety 'challenge'

Underlining that medicines should fulfil their real purpose – help people, not harm them – the United Nations health agency today launched a world-wide 'Challenge' that seeks to reduce severe, avoidable medication-associated damage across the globe by half over the next five years.

"We all expect to be helped, not harmed, when we take medication," said the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), Margaret Chan, announcing the new campaign *Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety*.

Apart from the human cost, medication errors place an enormous and unnecessary strain on health budgets. Preventing errors saves money and saves lives.

According to estimates, the global cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at \$42 billion annually or almost 1 per cent of total global health expenditure. In terms of impact on the health of people, for instance in the United States, medication errors cause at least one death every day and injure approximately 1.3 million people annually.

While low- and middle-income countries are estimated to have similar rates of medication-related adverse events to high-income countries, the impact is about twice as much in terms of the number of years of healthy life lost.

Furthermore, many countries lack good data, something that the new initiative will attempt to address.

The initiative will also improve the way medicines are prescribed, distributed and consumed, and increase awareness among patients about the risks associated with the improper use of medication.

It also urges countries to take early priority action to address key factors, including medicines with a high risk of harm if used improperly, patients who take multiple medications for different diseases and conditions, and patients going through transitions of care, in order to reduce medication errors and harm to patients.

The actions in the Challenge will focus on four areas: patients and the public, health care professionals, medicines as products, and systems and practices of medication.

The initiative also aims to make improvements in each stage of the medication use process including prescribing, dispensing, administering, monitoring and use and the UN health agency will disseminate guidance, and develop strategies, plans and tools to ensure that the medication process has the safety of patients at its core, in all health care facilities.

“Over the years, I have spoken to many people who have lost loved ones to medication-related errors,” said Sir Liam Donaldson, the WHO Envoy for Patient Safety. “Their stories, their quiet dignity and their acceptance of situations that should never have arisen have moved me deeply. It is to the memories of all those who have died due to incidents of unsafe care that this Challenge should be dedicated.”

This is WHO’s third global patient safety initiative, following the Clean Care is Safe Care challenge on hand hygiene in 2005 and the Safe Surgery Saves Lives challenge in 2008.

---

## **In special address, Chile’s President spotlights efficacy of UN Human Rights Council**

29 March 2017 – Addressing a special meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Chilean President today stressed the importance of multilateralism and the work of the 47-member body.

“I raise my voice in support of the efficacy of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council,” said Michelle Bachelet, stressing the need for the UN to increase a regular budget allocation to the human rights agenda from the current three per cent.

“In my opinion, it is important to preserve the essence of the Council and to prevent it from being used for alternative purposes by any one State. We are all responsible for ensuring that the international system works as it is supposed to,” she said.

“One fundamental element is the principle of adherence to international law, which includes respect for treaties and preventing the misuse of mechanisms or institutions designed to resolve differences,” she added.

Chile has resisted dictatorship and has taken charge of the burdensome legacy of brutal human rights violations, she said.

Among other things, Chile has made a commitment to head an initiative against torture to prevent this crime from occurring and promote ratification of international instruments related to the issue, said Ms. Bachelet.

After having received numerous recommendations, Chile in November 2016 modified the Penal Code that defined the crime of torture according to three categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence.

The Government is also working on efforts to present a bill that would create a national preventative mechanism against torture within the national human rights institution.

In his video message, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said that Chile has long been a strong human rights advocate at the international stage.

Chile has made great strides since the end of the dictatorship, but too many families still do not know the truth about what happened to their loved ones.

The right to truth for victims of gross human rights violations is inalienable. Any potential measure of pardon or early release for perpetrators must be carefully considered in light of human rights law, he said.

---

## **UN chief confirms the remains found in DRC those of the two missing experts**

29 March 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has confirmed the deaths of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been missing since 12 March, and vowed that the Organization would do “everything possible” to ensure that justice is done.

In a statement late yesterday, the UN chief expressed his deepest condolences to the families, loved ones and colleagues of Mr. Sharp (United States) and Ms. Catalan (Sweden) and said that the Organization will honour their memory by continuing to support the work of the Group of Experts and the whole UN family in the DRC.

“Michael and Zaida lost their lives seeking to understand the causes of conflict and insecurity in the DRC in order to help bring peace to the country and its people,” said Mr. Guterres.

He also called on the national authorities to continue to search for the four Congolese nationals who were accompanying the experts and said that the UN would cooperate with them in the continuing search.

Also in the statement, the Secretary General underscored that the UN will conduct an inquiry into the deaths.

“In case of criminal acts, the UN will do everything possible to ensure that justice is done,” he stressed.

Mr. Guterres also expressed hope that the cause of their deaths will be determined following a thorough examination and that the Congolese authorities will conduct a full investigation into the incident.

On Monday, peacekeepers from the UN Mission in the country (MONUSCO) discovered the two experts’ remains outside the city of Kananga in the DRC’s Kasai-Central province.

The Group of Experts on the DRC has been supporting the work of a Committee established by the Security Council to oversee sanctions measures, including arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze imposed upon armed groups in the country.

---

## Starving children in famine-facing countries threatened by lack of water, sanitation – UN agency

29 March 2017 – In African and Middle Eastern countries facing famine, unsafe water is as dangerous for severely malnourished children as lack of food, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today warned, noting that nearly 27 million people are at risk in northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

“Unsafe water can cause malnutrition or make it worse, no matter how much food a malnourished child eats, he or she will not get better if the water they are drinking is not safe,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes.

The UN agency is warning that a combination of malnutrition, dirty water and poor sanitation sets off a vicious cycle from which many children never recover.

In northeast Nigeria, where the fight on Boko Haram damaged or destroyed 75 per cent of water and sanitation infrastructure, some 3.8 million people have no access to safe water, according to UNICEF.

In Somalia, about one-third of the population is expected to need access to water and sanitation in the coming weeks, according to the UN agency, pushing the current needs from 3.3 million to 4.5 million of people.

Some 5.1 million people lack safe water, sanitation and hygiene in South Sudan, where half of the water points in the country have been damaged or

destroyed.

RELATED: UN aid chief calls for access, funds to prevent spread of South Sudan's famine

The fighting in Yemen has displaced at least 14.5 million people, leaving them without basic sanitation and adequate drinking water, UNICEF cautioned. According to the latest figures, almost 2 million children are at risk of diarrheal diseases which, even before the conflict, were the second leading cause of death among children under the age of five.

UNICEF is working with other UN agencies, national authorities and local partners to provide safe water and sanitation to children.

“But without an end to the conflicts plaguing these countries, without sustainable and unimpeded access to the children in need of support and without more resources, even our best efforts will not be enough,” Mr. Fontaine said.

---

## [UN health agency highlights importance of measles vaccine amid Europe outbreak](#)

29 March 2017 – Hundreds of measles cases have been reported in Europe where the disease was believed to be nearing elimination leading the United Nations health agency to urge families to vaccinate their children and for national authorities to take urgent measures to stop transmission at the borders.

“Outbreaks will continue in Europe, as elsewhere, until every country reaches the level of immunization needed to fully protect their populations,” said Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe.

At least 500 cases were diagnosed since this January, the majority in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Measles are endemic in all of the above countries, and the estimated national immunization coverage with the second dose of measles-containing vaccine is believed to be less than the 95 per cent threshold.

“Measles continues to spread within and among European countries, with the potential to cause large outbreaks wherever immunization coverage has dropped below the necessary threshold,” WHO reported.

The largest outbreaks are in Romania, where more than 3,400 cases have been reported since January of last year, and in Italy, where more than 850 cases are expected in the coming weeks.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that remains endemic in most parts of the world. International standards recommend that the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine be given in two doses, starting at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

"I urge all endemic countries to take urgent measures to stop transmission of measles within their borders, and all countries that have already achieved this to keep up their guard and sustain high immunization coverage. Together we must make sure that the hard-earned progress made towards regional elimination is not lost," said Dr. Jakab.