Report of an Informal Consultation
to Develop a ‘Regional Strategy’
for the Control of Viral Hepatitis

WHO-SEARO, New Delhi, 16–18 April 2012
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1. Inaugural session and opening remarks

An informal consultation was organized in the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) from 16-18 April 2012 with the overall objective to “develop a regional strategy for the control of viral hepatitis in the South-East Asia Region”.

The informal consultation was opened by Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia (SEA). In his remarks, he highlighted the importance and significant burden of acute and chronic viral hepatitis infections and consequences. Despite the efforts of Member States to prevent and control viral hepatitis infections, these diseases continue to remain serious public health problems in the WHO SEA Region. The World Health Assembly resolution (WHA63.18) adopted in May 2010 called for comprehensive prevention and control strategies for viral hepatitis. In particular, the Health Assembly requested WHO to establish, in collaboration with Member States, the necessary guidelines, strategies, time-bound goals and tools for the surveillance, prevention and control of viral hepatitis. WHO-SEARO has organized this informal consultation to formulate a new comprehensive strategy for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis intended for health policy-makers, donors and implementing agencies and institutions at national and regional levels.

Dr Vason Pinyowiwat, Technical Officer (Public Health), WHO-SEARO, introduced the participants from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, the temporary advisers and the WHO-secretariat. The names of Prof. Dr David Handojo Muljono from Indonesia, Dr Supamit Chunsuttiwat from Thailand and Prof. Dr Mohammad Ali from Bangladesh were then proposed by the Regional Director and they were elected as Chairperson, Co-Chairperson and Rapporteur respectively for the meeting.

The overall objective of the consultation was to:

- Develop a regional strategy for the control of viral hepatitis in the SEA Region.
The specific objectives were to:

- Review the burden of viral hepatitis and draft a regional strategic framework for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis;
- Develop guidelines on surveillance of viral hepatitis, including case definitions and a standard format, and
- Develop a draft “action plan” for implementation of surveillance activities for viral hepatitis.

2. **Overview of the WHO Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis**

An introduction to the WHO Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis was provided by Dr Tim Nguyen, WHO-HQ Global Hepatitis Programme. In 2010, the World Health Assembly adopted resolution 63.18 sponsored by Brazil, Columbia and Indonesia, which called for a comprehensive approach to hepatitis prevention and control and resolved that 28 July be designated as World Hepatitis Day in order to provide an opportunity for education and greater understanding of viral hepatitis as a global public health problem, and to stimulate the strengthening of preventive and control measures of this disease in Member States.

The resolution urges Member States to improve epidemiological surveillance systems and to strengthen laboratory capacity to generate reliable information, as well as incorporate the policies, strategies and tools recommended by WHO to strengthen national health systems in order to address the prevention and control of viral hepatitis effectively through the provision of health promotion and national surveillance, including tools for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of viral hepatitis, vaccination, information, communication and injection safety. WHO is requested to establish, in collaboration with Member States, the necessary guidelines, strategies, time-bound goals and tools for the surveillance, prevention and control of viral hepatitis; support the development of related scientific measures; improve the assessment of global and regional economic impact and estimate the burden of viral hepatitis and invite international organizations, financial institutions and other partners to provide support to developing countries.
The WHO Global Hepatitis Programme, created in December 2011, aims to: reduce the transmission of the various agents that cause viral hepatitis; reduce the morbidity and mortality due to viral hepatitis and improve the care of patients with viral hepatitis; and reduce the socioeconomic impact of viral hepatitis at individual, community and population levels. The strategy includes; (i) Partnerships, resource mobilization and communication; (ii) Data for policy and action; (iii) Prevention of virus transmission; and (iv) Screening, care and treatment (Four Axis Strategies).

The new estimate of worldwide viral hepatitis burden was presented. It was also stated that cirrhosis is now among leading causes of deaths. It was responsible for 1.2 million new deaths in 2010, and caused a total of 35 000 000 Years of Life Lost (YLL).

3. **Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis**

The participants intensively discussed the following draft documents;

- Burden of viral hepatitis in the countries of the WHO South-East Asia Region
- Regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis
  - Mission and vision; Themes and cross-cutting issues
  - Framework for surveillance
  - Framework for prevention
  - Framework for education
  - Framework for medical care and treatment
  - Framework for research
  - Framework for policy, planning and resource mobilization
- Guidelines for surveillance of viral hepatitis
- Action plan for the implementation of viral hepatitis surveillance.

It was proposed at the consultation that the SEARO Secretariat should incorporate comments and inputs provided by participants during the
meeting into the regional strategy on prevention and control of viral hepatitis, which will then be presented and reviewed by representatives from the Member States at the next regional consultation tentatively planned to be held in July 2012. It was also recommended at the consultation that WHO should invite experts and national surveillance focal points from Member States to discuss and develop the regional guidelines on surveillance of viral hepatitis, based on the final framework for surveillance.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The following were the recommended action points for WHO-SEARO and Member States that emerged from the discussion:

**Recommendations for WHO-SEARO**

1. To establish a regional technical advisory group for viral hepatitis with the following terms of reference;
   - Advise the Regional Director on policies, strategies and activities crucial for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis in the Region;
   - Provide a strategic direction in implementing the WHO regional strategy for prevention and control in Member States;
   - Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the control strategy and make practical recommendations;
   - Advise on the use of appropriate and new technology for effective prevention and control of viral hepatitis; and
   - Identify areas of operational research and capacity building required by countries.

2. To advocate and develop a regional strategy for resource mobilization; develop a list of priorities for funding, identify potential financial institutions interested to provide resources for prevention and control of viral hepatitis and organize meetings of potential donors.

3. To develop a standard protocol on evaluation of the national viral hepatitis surveillance system and support countries to conduct such evaluations.
(4) To facilitate establishment of a national centre for viral hepatitis surveillance and prevention, and a national centre for laboratory diagnoses of viral hepatitis in Member States.

(5) To support countries, efforts on pre-qualification of viral hepatitis diagnostics and quality assurance.

(6) To collaborate with Member States in building research capacity at national, institutional and individual levels, especially in training and engaging researchers on research management and application of research on viral hepatitis control.

(7) To support countries to coordinate hepatitis B birthdose vaccine delivery with other components of the Expended Programme on Immunization.

(8) To support counties, efforts in elimination of transmission of hepatitis B and C related to medical manipulation, including 100% of mandatory screening of all blood and blood products.

(9) To provide technical assistance to countries for developing medical services and for establishing standards of procedures and national referral centres for medical care and treatment of viral hepatitis.

(10) To provide technical support to countries on food safety, water quality, environmental sanitation and hygiene development.

Recommendations for Member States

(1) To establish a national committee on viral hepatitis responsible for the development of national strategy and programmes on viral hepatitis prevention and control, and for their supervision, coordination, implementation and monitoring at the national level.

(2) To identify, raise funds and mobilize financial resources from both public and private sectors to support the programme for prevention and control of viral hepatitis.

(3) To conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the national viral hepatitis surveillance system.

(4) To establish a national centre for surveillance and prevention of viral hepatitis and a national centre for laboratory diagnosis of viral hepatitis.
5. Closing session

Dr Supamit Chunsuttiwat, Co-Chairperson, expressed his gratitude to WHO-SEARO staff for organizing the informal consultation, and to all participants for their active participation and contribution to the development of the regional strategy for prevention and control of viral hepatitis. He then declared the meeting closed.
Annex 1

Objectives

The overall objective of the consultation is to ‘develop a regional strategy for the control of viral hepatitis in the South-East Asia Region’.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Review the burden of viral hepatitis and draft a regional strategic framework for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis;
2. Develop guidelines on the surveillance of viral hepatitis, including case definitions and a standard format, and
3. Develop a draft ‘action plan’ for the implementation of surveillance for viral hepatitis.
Annex 2

Agenda

(1) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Burden of viral hepatitis in the countries of the WHO South-East Asia Region
(2) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Mission and vision; Themes and cross cutting issues
(3) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for surveillance
(4) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for prevention
(5) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for education
(6) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for medical care and treatment
(7) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for research
(8) Review of regional strategy on control of viral hepatitis – Framework for policy, planning and resource mobilization
(9) Review guidelines for surveillance of viral hepatitis
(10) Review action plan for the implementation of viral hepatitis surveillance
(11) Conclusions & recommendations
Annex 4

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The World Health Assembly resolution (WHA63.18) adopted in May 2010 called for comprehensive prevention and control strategies for viral hepatitis. In particular, the Health Assembly requested WHO to establish, in collaboration with Member States, the necessary guidelines, strategies, time-bound goals and tools for the surveillance, prevention and control of viral hepatitis. WHO-SARO has organized this informal consultation to formulate a new comprehensive strategy for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis intended for health policymakers, donors and implementing agencies and institutions at national and regional levels.