

**Regional Meeting on WHO Guiding Principles on Organ, Tissue and
Cells Transplantation, Jaipur, India, 2-5 February 2009**

**Message from Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director,
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The medical importance of organ transplantation was recognized during the beginning of the last century when Dr Alexis Carrel was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1912 for his pioneering work. Surgical transplantation of human organs from deceased, as well as living, donors to sick and dying patients began after the Second World War. Over the past 50 years, the transplantation of human organs, tissues and cells has become a worldwide practice which has extended and greatly enhanced the quality of hundreds of thousands of lives. Continuous improvements in medical technology, particularly in relation to organ and tissue rejection, have enhanced the cost-effectiveness and utility of transplantation as an important intervention in fighting chronic disabling or life-threatening diseases.

Recognizing the importance of these issues and responding to World Health Assembly Resolutions (Resolutions WHA 40.13 and WHA 42.5), WHO

developed Guiding Principles on Organ Transplantation in 1991. Over the past 17 years the Guiding Principles have greatly influenced professional codes and practices and legislation around the world.

In the light of changes in practices and attitudes regarding organ and tissue transplantation and in response to the World Health Assembly Resolution in 2004 WHO has updated these Guiding Principles on Human Organ Transplantation in 2008 through an extensive process of global consultation.

The revised Guiding Principles are intended to provide an orderly, ethical and acceptable framework for the acquisition and transplantation of human cells, tissues and organs for therapeutic purposes. These address the issues of access, quality, safety and ethics in transplantation. In addition, WHO has launched a Global Knowledge base on Transplantation (GKT) in 2006 to collect global data on transplantation-related activities and practices, legal framework and organizational structure and xenotransplantation.

WHO estimates that globally, about 66 000 kidney transplants take place every year. In addition 21 000 liver and 6 000 heart transplants are undertaken. Estimated numbers of annual kidney transplants in India and Thailand are around 5 000 and 300, respectively. These are performed in around 100 centres in India and 30 centres in Thailand. Almost 60% of kidney donors in the SEA

Region are live unrelated donors. The number of heart and liver transplants in the SEA Region is very small.

Non-availability of adequate numbers of donors is a major challenge. In India alone, 150 000 patients suffer from end-stage renal disease, while 200 000 patients need liver transplantation and 80 000 require heart transplantations. The huge gap between supply and demand leads to unethical practices. In spite of availability of legal frameworks on transplantation of human organs in several countries in South-East Asia Region, commercialization and trafficking in human organs is frequently reported in media in various countries. Thus, ethical practices in organ donation and transplantation, as well as access to adequate number of organs, are both major issues in the Region.

In recent years, there have been efforts to broaden the scope of ethical analysis in health care to focus more directly on public-health issues. Health ethics involves a process of systematic and continuous reflection on the norms and values which guide decisions about health care at the personal, institutional, or societal level, and by which the outcomes of such decisions may be judged. Compared to medical ethics which focuses on individuals, health ethics also encompasses the full range of health determinants and their interconnections viewed from a societal or systems perspective. The revised WHO Guiding Principles on Organ Transplantation address these issues and provide possible

solutions for incorporation by Member countries in their national regulations and practices pertaining to transplantation.

This meeting has been organized to disseminate recent developments as well as the revised WHO guiding principles in order to improve legislation, ethical practices and technologies on organ transplantation in this Region. It will address such issues as promotion of organ donation to enhance their availability; prevention of trade in organs and exploitation of humans; improvement of the quality, efficacy and safety of donations and transplantation; and transparency in practices.

I am pleased to see that all Member States of South-East Asia Region are participating in this meeting, which is being facilitated by an eminent group of international experts who have contributed immensely in updating the WHO Guiding Principles. I also wish to reiterate that as a follow-up of this meeting and to support national efforts, WHO shall continue to provide the required technical support in strengthening health systems to provide improved services for organ transplantation. I wish the meeting every success in its deliberations, and thank the Government of India for hosting this meeting.