

Presentation

By
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at

World Alliance for Patient Safety Day

Moscow
9 December 2005

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**DR SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Excellencies;

Distinguished Participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a great honour for me to address this august audience on the occasion of the World Alliance for Patient Safety Day.

The increasing incidence of documented cases of adverse events in health care has led to a growing concern about patient safety, which is a fundamental principle of quality health management and services. Patient safety is seen as a critical component of quality medical care in the broader context of health services. We, in the South-East Asia Region, view patient safety as a major challenge for improving provider performance.

Significant improvement of health systems' performance can be achieved by preventing adverse events in patient care. We are working closely with Member States to ensure safety of drugs, vaccines, laboratory procedures and health care practices. This includes, among others, improved control of hospital-acquired infections, safe pregnancy, injection safety, and blood transfusion. There is a need to pursue more "patient-centered" approach to health care. This calls for a more humanistic practice in dealing with people's health. This is with the view to improving overall quality of life of the entire population.

In spite of advancements in science and technology, medicine has come under increased scrutiny. This is particularly due to concerns about an overly technological orientation, and the subsequent distancing from the social and psychological needs of patients and families. The rise in consumer awareness on health-related issues has also led to an increased demand for improved communication and information. The information on the new models of care, and for increased participation by people and community in service planning.

A Joint strategy for tackling major sources of harm to patients is being developed between the WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions. This is with the view to ensuring a gradual reduction in the level of hazards and instances of actual harm.

Health care associated or hospital-acquired infections are a major concern in patient safety to day. Infections contribute to death and disability, apart from promoting resistance to antibiotics. These also entail additional expenses for patients who would have already spent scarce resources for treatment of their primary ailments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On another aspect, the South-East Asia Region produces over 1,000 metric tons of infectious health care waste every day. Most of these are very poorly managed and, therefore, pose a major risk to peoples' health. We are encouraging countries to develop a country-wide system for health care waste management.

Other major challenge is the lack of safe blood, which links to inadequate awareness and motivation to voluntarily and regularly donate blood. Only 61 per cent of all blood donations in the Region are voluntary. Collection of blood from voluntary donors and testing of blood through reliable laboratory are being stressed.

Furthermore, an assessment of injection practices was conducted in 2002-2003, which showed that almost two-thirds of all injections were unsafe. Seventy per cent of the injections were for immunization-related activities, and almost three-fourths of these were unsafe, primarily due to use of glass syringes. Based on this finding, WHO has promoted the use of Auto-Disposable (AD) syringes in the immunization programme.

As far as safety of drugs and medicines is concerned. It is estimated that over 50 per cent of all medicines are prescribed, dispensed, or sold inappropriately. Therefore, the promotion of rational use of drugs has been intensified in the countries of the Region. Pharmacovigilance (monitoring of Adverse Drug Reactions) has been initiated in most countries in the Region. National Drug Regulation is being strengthened to ensure availability of safe and effective drugs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A complete safe health care system is an ideal that may never be realized. However, in practice, progress is likely to be achieved from a sustained and relentless effort to reduce harm to patients.

Finally, I thank the organizers for giving me this opportunity to deliver this address. I wish you, all the best in your deliberations.