

## WHO launches global patient safety campaign

In a major global drive to improve the safety of millions of patients who become ill, disabled or die due to the unintended adverse effects of health care such as medical errors, WHO has launched a high-profile campaign called the World Alliance for Patient Safety.

Director-General LEE Jong-wook and other senior WHO officials joined US Health Secretary Tommy Thompson and Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for the campaign's launch in Washington on 27 October.

Adverse effects of treatment due to factors like unsafe injections, blood transfusions or surgery, as well as inappropriate medication and medical error

exact a high toll in human life in many countries and occur in spite of high quality health care.

WHO said a team of government representatives, patient safety activists and top scientists will help develop policy and practice solutions to help governments to improve patient safety. Donaldson told the *Bulletin* the core idea was for countries to share experience and learn from each others' mistakes.

"Health care has been much slower than other industries to understand that the cause of error lies in weak systems and that it is by learning from things that go wrong that health care can be made safer," Donaldson said: "Over the years throughout the world lives will be saved, risks to patients will be reduced and many lessons will be learned".

Some countries have already initiated patient safety plans. Details of their experiences and the solutions they have developed in the field will be published on the WHO patient safety website so that other governments can draw on and apply them.

WHO said studies in a number of countries show that 3.5–16.6% of hospital patients are affected: this means that as many as one in every 10 hospital patients suffer some form of preventable harm resulting in ill-health, disability or death around the world.

Some studies put the cost of the adverse effects of health care in the United States to be as much as US\$ 29 billion a year, while in the United Kingdom these may be as much as US\$ 6 billion a year. The situation in developing countries is even worse although there is less data, WHO said. <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/en/> ■

## WHO's where in October

- WHO and its partners launched the largest ever global polio immunization campaign in October to reach more than 300 million children in Asia and Africa and to quell an epidemic in Africa that threatens to paralyse millions of children. The campaign kicked off on **8 October** in Africa, where health workers aimed to vaccinate 80 million children in 25 countries in four days (see story).
- WHO linked up with the International Association on the Study of Pain (IASP) and the European Federation of IASP Chapters in a new campaign on **11 October** to draw global attention to the need for better pain relief for people with diseases like cancer and AIDS.
- WHO launched its new "five keys" strategy on **13 October**, which promotes five simple ways to reduce disease caused by unsafe food.
- With the release of a new study on **21 October** in the Western Pacific Region, WHO called on governments in developing countries to do more to improve prevention and treatment of epilepsy. WHO said 70–90% of people with epilepsy in developing countries do not receive appropriate treatment.
- Health experts from WHO, governments and civil society gathered on **21 and 22 October** to find ways to improve immunization coverage in the European Region, following a recent spate of measles outbreaks that prompted concern over whether enough is being done to get children vaccinated (see story).
- Following a resolution passed by the World Health Assembly in 2002, WHO Director-General LEE Jong-wook launched a campaign on **27 October** to improve the safety of millions of patients who become ill, disabled or die from adverse effects of health care such as errors or drug side-effects (see story).
- David Byrne, the outgoing European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection (see picture) took up his newly-created post as WHO Special Envoy on the revision of the International Health Regulations on **31 October**. Byrne, an Irish national, will be responsible for steering the revision of the 1969 Regulations, the main piece of international legislation governing the control of infectious diseases, when officials from WHO's 192 Member States meet from **1 November to 12 November**. The final draft will be presented to the World Health Assembly in May 2005.
- WHO's Stop TB and HIV/AIDS departments are setting up a new joint task force to streamline efforts to get treatment to patients who are co-infected with the two diseases, a double scourge that has a devastating effect particularly in Africa (see story).
- The MDG goals table published in the *Bulletin* (2004;82:806) have been updated with progress on tuberculosis control. This table is available from: [http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/82/10/en/mdg\\_table.pdf](http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/82/10/en/mdg_table.pdf)



David Byrne, outgoing European Commissioner for Health.

European Commission (2001)

## Experts raise alarm over measles in Europe

Experts from WHO and its partner agencies met to find ways to improve immunization coverage in the European Region, following a recent spate of measles outbreaks that prompted concern over whether enough is being done to get children vaccinated.

For more on these and other WHO news:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2004/en/>