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/

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.