

One of the largest registers, ClinicalTrials.gov, which is hosted by the US National Institutes of Health, contains some 23 000 registered trials, while the International Standard Randomised Controlled Trial Number Register in the United Kingdom contains some 3500.

These registers hold mainly information about trials done in the developed world. A number of countries, including some from the developing world, have plans to start their own registers.

“There is a clear need to consolidate all information on clinical trials to use resources efficiently and reduce the chances that a trial might be registered in more than one register,” Unterlerchner said. He argued that WHO is best placed to do this as a global body representing 192 Member States that is able to set norms and standards in research, policy and practice.

WHO does not plan to set up its own clinical trials register. The idea is for WHO to set rules and standards on how existing registers should operate and how they should work together.



Millions of people around the world participate in clinical trials and are affected by the results of those trials. The picture shows a group of children in Colombia who are queuing up to be given a malaria vaccine in a clinical trial in the 1990s.

WHO/TDR/O. Martel

WHO plans to bring all the registers meeting these standards into a global register network, searchable on one WHO search portal.

The portal will give sick people the chance to find out about research into

their particular disease and to ask their doctors to enrol them in a clinical trial that may offer them access to innovative treatments that are not yet widely available. <http://www.who.int/ictrp> ■

Recent news from WHO

- WHO Director-General LEE Jong-wook visited parts of Pakistan that were affected by the **8 October 2005 earthquake**. He praised the response of the government and the international community to the disaster, but said that WHO still needs US\$ 13 million, almost half of the US\$ 27 million initially requested to help people there survive the winter. Hundreds of thousands of people still need better shelter, the cold and the crowded conditions in some camps increase the risk of respiratory infections, and getting health care to people who live high in the mountains is a major challenge.
- WHO published a new report, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Health Synthesis*, on 9 December, on the complex links between preserving **healthy and biodiverse natural ecosystems** and protecting human health. To read the report, please see: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/ecosystems/ecosystems05/en/>
- Every year millions of people are pushed into **poverty** because of **high medical costs** paid for out of their own pockets. Experts from 40 countries at a conference in Berlin looked at ways to provide social protection for people who cannot afford these costs and to promote investment in health. The 5–7 December meeting was convened by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organization and WHO.
- WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization made it clear on 5 December that it is safe to eat chicken, eggs and other **poultry products** as long as they are properly cooked. They issued this advice to national food safety authorities after sales of poultry products fell over consumer fears that these products might be infected with a bird flu virus.
- Lesotho launched a groundbreaking campaign on World AIDS Day, 1 December, to encourage everyone in the southern African country to get tested for HIV. Lesotho is offering confidential and voluntary **HIV testing and counselling** door-to-door with the goal of reaching all households in Lesotho by the end of 2007.
- With an additional US \$1 billion per year, **immunization** could save 10 million more lives in a decade. With this increased investment, more than 70 million children in the world's poorest countries would be protected each year against 14 major childhood diseases by 2015, according to a WHO/UNICEF study presented at the 7–9 December meeting of representatives of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI).

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2005/en/index.html>