

For the public and even health professionals, the first stage is education. For example, researchers found that few women in Hong Kong are aware of the role of HPV in causing cervical cancer. "HPV and cervical cancer are not that well-taught in medical or nursing school, so health-care providers need education too," said Professor Hexter Y S Ngan of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Hong Kong Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine.

Hong Kong officials say they do not have enough data to decide whether to introduce the HPV vaccine widely. "There are data on the prevalence of HPV infection of certain population sub-groups in Hong Kong,

but prevalence data for the general female population and some population sub-groups, such as very young females, are insufficient," said Dr Tse Lai Yin, consultant in community medicine at the Hong Kong Department of Health's Centre for Health Protection.

Aside from cost-effectiveness, vaccination delivery and education, the advent of the HPV vaccine has raised other issues. Promoting an anti-cancer vaccine and, at the same time, making it clear that HPV is a sexually transmitted infection will require deft handling in the wording of policy, education and publicity materials.

"Screening and treatment services will still be required, because the vac-

cines only prevent about 70% of cervical cancer cases and because it will be years, if not decades, before we see the full benefit of vaccination in terms of a reduction in the incidence of cervical cancer," said Dr Andreas Ullrich, medical officer with WHO's department of Chronic Disease and Health Promotion.

Countries will also need to decide what type of screening testing to use, as traditional cytology, visual methods and HPV-specific testing have their pros and cons.

"There are challenges for countries in terms of cost and so on," said Aguado, "but this vaccine is unique and offers tremendous possibilities." ■

Jane Parry, *Hong Kong SAR*

## Recent news from WHO

- WHO and the United Nations Population Fund welcomed two new vaccines **for human papillomavirus (HPV)**, the virus that causes most cervical cancer, as a major opportunity for the developing world on 12 December.
- **Dr Margaret Chan** took office as Director-General of WHO on 4 January. On 9 January, Chan named **Dr Anarfi Asamoah-Baah** (see picture) as her new deputy director-general. Asamoah-Baah took up his duties immediately. He has held senior positions at WHO since 1998. He has been widely respected for his leadership in HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, as well as communicable diseases, health technology and pharmaceuticals, and in external relations. Prior to joining WHO, he was the director of medical services in his native Ghana.
- WHO said on 9 January it was drawing up a five-year plan to improve access to treatment for the victims of **rabies and snake-bites**. Close to five million snake-bites and scorpion stings are reported each year, mostly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- WHO reported on 16 January progress made by an **electronic record-keeping system** in western Kenya that has revolutionized HIV care with timely medical tests and treatment. The programme, which serves 70 000 patients, was developed through a partnership between Moi University in Eldoret and Indiana University in the United States, with assistance from WHO.
- **Measles** deaths have fallen sharply since 1999, from an estimated 873 000 in 1999 to 345 000 in 2005, according to the Measles Initiative partners. This group, comprising the American Red Cross, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United Nations Foundation, UNICEF and the WHO, said on 18 January that this 60% decrease means that the partnership has surpassed the United Nations goal to halve measles deaths between 1999 and 2005.
- WHO published its first report with global and country data on progress being made by Member States on the use of **information and communications technologies** to improve public health. *Building Foundations for eHealth* was released on 23 January. The web version is available at: <http://www.who.int/goe/>



WHO

Dr Anarfi Asamoah-Baah

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