

Public health round-up

Healthy ageing focus of World Health Day



Promoting a healthy lifestyle across the life-course to save lives, protect health and alleviate disability and pain in older age is the theme of World Health Day on 7 April.

With this year's World Health Day campaign, the World Health Organization (WHO) wants to go beyond awareness-raising to bring about concrete action and positive change. The World Health Day campaign aims to engage all of society – from policy-makers and politicians to older people and youth – to take action to create societies that appreciate and acknowledge older people as valued resources and enable them to participate fully; and to help protect and improve health as people age.

The official slogan for World Health Day 2012 is "Good health adds life to years".

Safe drinking water target met

The proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water has halved, according to a joint report issued by WHO and UNICEF [the United Nations Children's Fund].

Between 1990 and 2010, more than two billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources, such as piped supplies and protected wells.

This means that a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has been met, well ahead of the 2015 target.

The report, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation 2012*, by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, says at the end of 2010 89% of the world's population, or 6.1 billion people, used improved drinking water sources. The report estimates that by 2015 92% of the global population will have access to improved drinking water.

"For children this is especially good news," said UNICEF executive director Anthony Lake. "Every day more than 3000 children die from diarrhoeal diseases. Achieving this target will go a long way to saving children's lives."

Lake warned that victory could not yet be declared as at least 11% of the world's population – 783 million people – are still without access to safe drinking water.

"The numbers are still staggering," he said. "But the progress announced today is proof that MDG targets can be met with the will, the effort and the funds."

WHO in the 80s

'A time of transition' is the key theme running through a new book telling the history of WHO between 1978 and 1987.

The fourth ten years of the World Health Organization: 1978–1987 describes the public health crises of the

1980s, including famines in Africa and the beginning of the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] epidemic.

The author, Socrates Litsios, a former senior scientist at WHO, said: "It's about a transition period, from the optimism of the 70s to the economic problems of the developing world."

The book is the fourth in the series of official WHO histories. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241564298_eng.pdf

Preventing antimicrobial resistance

The evolving threat of antimicrobial resistance – options for action, comes at a time when antimicrobial resistance has evolved to become a worldwide health threat, with every antibiotic ever developed at risk.

The book consists of case studies showing successful strategies and measures to combat antimicrobial resistance. For instance, in Norway, the introduction of effective vaccines in farmed salmon and trout together with improved fish health management reduced the annual use of antimicrobials in farmed fish by 98% between 1987 and 2004.

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2012/9789241503181_eng.pdf

Taxing tobacco

Higher tobacco taxes and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship in the Americas are key measures recommended by a new report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The new *Tobacco control report for the Region of the Americas* summarizes country-level progress in the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=16836&Itemid

Research and innovation

'Forum 2012', to be held April 24–26 in Cape Town will focus on networking and partnerships for research and innovation. It will be jointly hosted by

New dementia report



Cathy Greenblatt

Dementia: a public health priority is being launched on 11 April at a lunchtime briefing at WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, with a photo exhibit at the United Nations headquarters in the same city.

"The report is expected to be a resource that will facilitate governments, policy-makers and other stakeholders to address the impact of dementia as an increasing threat to global health. It is hoped that the key messages in the report will promote dementia as a national public health and social care priority worldwide," write Dr Shekhar Saxena, director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO, and Marc Wortmann, executive director at Alzheimer Disease International, in the report.

Currently, 35.6 million people worldwide were estimated to have dementia in 2010, of whom 58% live in low- and middle-income countries. These figures are projected to nearly double every 20 years, to 65.7 million in 2030 and 115.4 million in 2050. There are 7.7 million new cases of dementia each year.

The report calls for action at international and national level to improve the quality of life of people with dementia, their caregivers and their families.

the Council on Health Research and Development Group (COHRED) and the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa.

"The forum's ambition is to improve the links among the various actors, across sectors, that play the key roles in making research and innovation work for health, equity and development," said Professor Carel Ijsselmuiden, director of the COHRED Group. "This marks a new day for research for health and development and with Forum 2012 COHRED aims to create and nurture the 'improbable partnerships' for action towards a world beyond aid."

Research scan

Red meat consumption linked to early mortality

Red meat consumption is associated with early deaths and increased mor-

tality from cardiovascular diseases and cancer, scientists say.

The study, published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* last month, also suggests that replacing red meat with other sources of protein lowers the risk of early death.

In the USA-based study, of 37 698 men from the Health Professionals Follow-up Study (1986–2008) and 83 644 women from the Nurses' Health Study (1980–2008), scientists investigated the association between red meat intake and cause-specific and total mortality.

After adjustment for major lifestyle and dietary risk factors, the pooled hazard ratio of total mortality for a one-serving-per-day increase was 1.13 (95% confidence interval, CI: 1.07–1.20) for unprocessed red meat and 1.20 (95% CI: 1.15–1.24) for processed red meat.

Previously, several studies have suggested that vegetarians have greater

longevity compared with non-vegetarians, but this might not be ascribed to the absence of red meat only. <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/archinternmed.2011.2287>

Preventing postpartum haemorrhage

Omitting 'controlled cord traction', a gentle pulling of the umbilical cord, has little effect on increasing the risk of postpartum haemorrhage in childbirth, a study has found.

The findings, published in the *Lancet* last month, have important implications for expanding access to effective care and could have a substantial impact on maternal survival in places where access to skilled medical staff is difficult.

More than 24 000 women participated in this study, which was a randomized controlled trial in 16 hospitals and two primary health-care centres in Argentina, Egypt, India, Kenya, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)60206-2/abstract#aff1](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)60206-2/abstract#aff1)

Looking ahead

7 April: World Health Day – Ageing and health <http://www.who.int/world-health-day>

24–26 April: Forum 2012 – conference hosted by the Council on Health Research and Development (COHRED) and the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa <http://www.forum2012.org>

25 April: World Malaria Day <http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/worldmaliaday/>

21–26 May: Sixty-Fifth World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland

31 May: World No Tobacco Day – Tobacco industry interference <http://www.who.int/tobacco/wntd>

14 June: World Blood Donor Day <http://www.who.int/worldblooddonorday>

28 July: World Hepatitis Day http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/annual/world_hepatitis_day