



1912 · 2012
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World Health Profession Alliance WHPA

66th World Health Assembly Intervention

Agenda Item 16.1. Global Vaccine Action Plan

Honorable Chairman, Honorable Members of the World Health Assembly,

We would like to commend WHO on its commitment to the implementation of the Global Vaccine Action Plan. We appreciate WHO's guidance to member states to develop national monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms and annually report on progress made, challenges encountered and lessons learned. We are encouraged to see that the proposed Framework for Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability includes monitoring of stakeholders' commitments to the action plan, tracking resources invested in vaccines and proposed indicators to facilitate the process.

We, however, are disappointed that the Monitoring Framework does not mention the "life-course" approach highlighted in the Global Vaccine Plan "to make the benefits of immunization available to all those at risk at every age group."

The Global Vaccine Plan takes note of health workers as an adult group at "special risk" in need of vaccines, such as human papillomavirus, rabies and, especially, influenza. According to WHO, influenza causes approximately 250,000 – 500,000 annual deaths worldwide. Nosocomial infections are a major threat to patient safety, and influenza outbreaks in particular can have serious implications for patients with already weakened immune systems. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that, in the United States alone, an average season of influenza results in tens of thousands of deaths and as many as 200,000 hospitalizations due to influenza-related causes.

Physicians and other healthcare workers play a key role in both transmitting and preventing the disease. Immunizing healthcare workers has a double benefit of

protecting healthcare workers and indirectly protecting their patients, making immunization against influenza one of the most cost-effective interventions.

Although WHO acknowledges the importance of pandemic influenza preparedness (Agenda Item 15.2) and access to the vaccine, the Global Vaccine Action Plan contains only one indicator to measure progress towards a universal influenza vaccine. There is no indicator regarding the importance of making the vaccine available to physicians and other health workers to protect their patients, nor is there an indicator on national pandemic influenza preparedness plans.

In the context of a highly transmittable disease that poses significant medical risk to vulnerable patients and threatens the availability of healthcare workers, a disease that has potential to become epidemic and/or pandemic and for which a safe and affordable vaccine is available, we propose the following:

- Stress the importance of the “life-course” approach to immunizations and acknowledge healthcare workers as a group “at risk” and in need of receiving immunizations in the Global Vaccine Action Plan.
- Encourage member states to invest in healthcare workers immunization programs, particularly for influenza, as part of their national immunization programs.

Develop appropriate indicators for influenza immunization of healthcare workers as part of the following strategic level indicators: (i) The benefits of immunization are equitably extended to all people, (ii) Strong immunization systems are an integral part of a well-functioning health system.

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