Malaysia shares lessons on studying burden of disease with counterparts in Viet Nam

As part of a study tour funded by the World Health Organization, representatives of the Burden of Disease Project of the Hanoi School of Public Health visited Malaysia from 7 to 10 February 2006 to meet with experts in the Ministry of Health. Viet Nam’s Burden of Disease Project is at a critical phase of development that requires detailed planning and preparations. In view of this, Dr Le Cu Linh, Mr Pham Viet Cuong and Ms Nguyen Thi Trang Nhung set out to learn how Malaysia successfully conducted its study on the burden of disease in 2004. This visit was primarily intended for the group from Viet Nam to meet, discuss and share experiences and opportunities with experts and colleagues at the Division of Burden of Disease in Malaysia’s Ministry of Health. The group particularly discussed topics on preparation for such a large-scale project, the roles of different stakeholders and technical groups, data sources and guidelines for research, as well as opportunities for future collaboration. The group was welcomed by Dr A. Faudzi Yusoff, Head of the Burden of Disease Division. Dr Faudzi provided an overview of Malaysia’s National Burden of Disease Study project, touching upon its history, the involvement of stakeholders and technical groups, the timeframe, budgeting principles, as well as the international collaboration. He likewise presented information regarding the overall data sources for estimating disability-adjusted life years (DALY) in Malaysia, the health system structure as well as demographic characteristics, and discussed about guidelines that were applied in the burden of disease project, as potentials for future collaboration. The group presented a draft framework for the Burden of Disease Project in Viet Nam, and had an intensive discussion with Dr Faudzi. The group also visited the Information and Documentation System Unit of the Ministry of Health in Putrajaya, Malaysia to learn about the Ministry’s Health Management Information System, i.e. how health data were obtained, analysed and stored at the central level. Dr Lailanor Ibrahim, person in-charge of the unit, hosted the group’s visit. The study tour ended with a visit to the Institute for Health Systems Research. Dr Maimunah Hamid, Director, made a presentation on the dissemination of the National Burden of Disease Study findings. The group learnt how research findings are used in Malaysia as a source of evidence for making policy in the health sector.
Informal Consultation on Health Information System Strategic Plan for the Western Pacific Region

An Informal Consultation on the Health Information System Strategic Plan for the Western Pacific Region was held in Manila, Philippines from 28 to 30 November 2005. The objectives of the informal consultation were: to review and finalize the draft Health Information System Strategic Plan for the Western Pacific Region for 2006-2015; to prioritize strategies, develop plans and identify forms and sources of support needed by member countries in order to scale up activities for the implementation of the Strategic Plan; and to identify ways for member countries to integrate inputs, enhance capacity for knowledge management, and use health information. The Health Information System Strategic Plan for the Western Pacific Region for 2006-2015 consists of seven major strategies: advocacy; development of policies, regulations and legislation related to health information systems; enhancement of capacity for knowledge management and use of health information; strengthening of the application of information and communication technology; strengthening, harmonization and integration of data collection systems; improvement of data quality; and system maintenance. During the meeting, it was agreed that the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan should be monitored, and that countries should take up a number of actions and initiatives identified in the Strategic Plan. For more information, please contact the Health Information and Evidence for Policy Unit, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific at: HIN_Unit@wpro.who.int.

Regional training on DevInfo technology

Since the global release of DevInfo technology in June 2004, a number of activities have been undertaken at the global, regional and country levels to build capacity in the use and operation of the database system for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals. In January 2006, a week-long training on DevInfo technology was conducted by the United Nations Development Programme, United Nation’s Children’s Fund, and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Participants came from government agencies of various countries, as well as from other United Nations agencies. The purpose of the training was to teach participants how to use DevInfo to create databases for monitoring human development.

The activity focused on strengthening the capacity of United Nations country teams and government partners in the use of data for strategic planning. Three modules of DevInfo technology were discussed, namely: user interface, database administration and customization. Upon completion of the training course, participants were tasked to create a customized adaptation of a DevInfo database using core features of the Database Administration Module. They were also given the opportunity to test their knowledge and presentation skills. The materials for the workshop may be downloaded from the UNESCAP website: www.unescap.org/stat/meet/devinfo/index.asp.
**About DevInfo technology**

The Millennium Development Goals are time-bound and should be monitored using agreed upon indicators. To assist in data collection, analysis and application for evidence-based policy development, a powerful software tool was designed to help countries monitor the Millennium Development Goals and advocate their achievement through policy measures, multisectoral strategies and the development of appropriate interventions. This technology offers a database tool to organize, store and display data in tabular, graphical or map formats with unique features linking indicators to strategic monitoring frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals, National Poverty Reduction Strategies and other national monitoring frameworks. The software supports both standard and user-defined indicators.

The standard indicators are those of the Millennium Development Goals, which are at the core of the package, but additional indicators can also be included. The "look" of the software can be customized to encourage local ownership. Also, the software supports up to 10 levels of geographical coverage. It contains a mapping component and includes maps to the second geographical level for all countries. It is available in six official United Nations languages, and can also support local language versions. For more information on DevInfo, visit www.devinfo.org or www.undg.org/content.cfm?id=1200.

“The latest version of the DevInfo software, version 5.0, was released in May 2006.”

**RHINO workshop: Information for action at facility and community levels**

The Routine Health Information Network (RHINO) held its third international workshop from 26 February to 3 March 2006 in Chiang Rai, Thailand. The workshop focused on data collection and information use at community and facility levels of the health care system. Together, the community and facility represent the service delivery interface of the health system, i.e. the level “where action takes place”. RHINO was created under the MEASURE Evaluation Project, a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that focuses on improving the use of information for evidence-based decision-making. RHINO’s mission is to modernize routine health information systems as well as improve the practice of system design and implementation by incorporating the lessons learnt and best practices from various countries and organizations. Routine health information is defined as information collected as part of the normal operation of health services on a regular basis. The workshop brought together managers, experts and academics working in
RHINO Workshop (Cont.)

the field of routine health information systems. The objectives of the workshop were:

• to examine lessons learnt and best practices related to the production of quality data at community and facility levels;

• to examine lessons learnt and best practices regarding the use of information for evidence-based decision-making related to individual and community health interventions; and

• to reinforce RHINO’s role in the development of routine health information systems via sharing of knowledge and experiences.

The workshop was arranged around five thematic groups, namely, community level; primary care level; hospital level; HIV/AIDS interventions; and maternal, neonatal and child health. Most of the 110 participants were from USAID-funded projects around the world. Health Metrics Network sponsored participants from countries that it supports. The workshop was a good opportunity for countries to discuss experiences and approaches for health information systems development.

RHINO is using a prism framework, as shown in Figure 1, which does not essentially differ from the framework of the Health Metrics Network. For more information, please visit: http://rhinonet.org/tikiwiki/tiki-index.php?page=ThirdInternationalWorkshop. Or, please email SAP_Unit@wpro.who.int.

Evidence-informed Policy Networks (EVIPNet) Asia

Evidence-informed Policy Networks (EVIPNet) was launched in early 2005 by the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, in collaboration with the Department of Research Policy and Cooperation, WHO Headquarters. The Asian network is composed of seven teams from five countries, namely, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam. China has three teams in Beijing, Shandong province and Sichuan province. The first workshop was held in June 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Following that workshop, all seven teams submitted letters of intent for planning phase activities. They have all received some seed funding for these activities.

The implementation phase of EVIPNet is planned for the next five years. Following Asia’s lead, a similar African network was initiated at a workshop in the Republic of Congo in March 2006.

An essential component of EVIPNet is networking, both within and among the member countries, with the purpose of improving the use of evidence in health policy-making and health services. For more information, see: EVIPNet: translating the spirit of Mexico. The Lancet, 2005, 366: 1758–1760, or please email SAP_Unit@wpro.who.int.
Western Pacific Region Index Medicus: an update

The Global Health Library has been conceptualized by WHO Headquarters Library to extend to all the people the benefits of the knowledge that is essential to the fullest attainment of health. One of the contents of the Global Health Library is the Global Index Medicus (GIM), which currently hosts the regional index medicus produced by the WHO Regional Offices in Africa, the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Asia. The regional index medicus can be searched individually or simultaneously through a federated search engine. As a contribution to the Global Health Library, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office is creating its own regional index medicus to be deployed alongside the other regional medical indexes in the global portal. In line with this, a Regional Workshop of National Focal Point Librarians on the Global Health Library was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2005 to identify the activities required to produce a regional index medicus and the necessary steps to produce a regional union list of medical periodicals. The workshop recommended, inter alia, the scope or coverage and selection of the journals to be indexed for the regional medical index, named Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM).

Three key activities have already been conducted for the WPRIM project. First, a professional librarian from the Philippines was recruited to assess the capabilities of Member States in the Region, in terms of human, material and information technology resources, for developing their national index medicus and joining the regional index medicus project. Second, an expert from the Republic of Korea volunteered to facilitate the initiation of the regional index medicus by meeting with medical librarians, information officers and medical journal editors from the Philippines. Staff from the Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors visited WHO’s Regional Office in Manila and offered their customized software used for the KoreaMed (Korean Index Medicus) for the proposed WPRIM. And third, a virtual community, named Global Health Library Western Pacific Working Group, was set up to allow registered members of the core group to discuss issues relative to the development of WPRIM. Other project developments include the agreement of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific to host the test site of WPRIM on its server; the installation of Linux operating system, KoreaMed and KOMCI program at the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development; and the drafting of the WPRIM concept paper and workplan for 2006-2007.

An Informal Consultation on the Development of the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus was held from 30 to 31 March 2006 at the WHO Regional Office in Manila. During the meeting, participants discussed the selection and review of medical and health journals to be included in WPRIM and the methodologies of peer review. Minimum selection criteria were set to be used as benchmarks in the screening of medical and health journals from member countries. It was suggested that the virtual community be changed from Global Health Library Western Pacific Working Group to WPRIM. For more information on WPRIM, please e-mail LIB_Unit@wpro.who.int.
Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI)

The Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) provides free or very low-cost online access to the major journals in biomedical and related social sciences to local, not-for-profit institutions in developing countries. This is a WHO initiative, in cooperation with major medical journal publishers, developed within the framework of the Health InterNetwork project of the United Nations, to bridge the health information gap between developed and developing countries. In the Western Pacific Region, the countries and areas eligible for free access are: Cambodia, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Viet Nam. Countries that must pay the nominal fee of US$ 1000 per institution per year are: the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. In order to fully utilize HINARI, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office has embarked on training activities to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff who not only work in HINARI-registered institutions, but also search and retrieve health information through the HINARI portal. A biregional training course on HINARI was held in Bangkok, Thailand in May 2005, with participants from Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. A similar workshop for learning centre supervisors of the Pacific Open Learning Health Net and medical librarians in the Pacific was held in Suva, Fiji from 29 November to 2 December 2005, with participants from Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. National training workshops are planned for staff of HINARI-registered institutions in August 2006 in Papua New Guinea and in October 2006 in Mongolia.

Western Pacific Advisory Committee for Health Research

The Western Pacific Advisory Committee for Health Research held its biennial meeting in Manila from 4 to 6 October 2005. Meeting reports were distributed to WHO country offices and meeting participants in April 2006. For a copy of the report, please contact Mrs Elynn Ampol at ampole@wpro.who.int.

WHO’s health research website

For more information on training courses and grant opportunities, visit the health research website of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific: http://www.wpro.who.int/health_topics/health_research. The site is constantly being updated and is being developed as a good source of information on health research in member countries.

Funding Opportunities for Health Research

The WHO Regional Office of the Western Pacific, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, World Bank and WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, has invited applications for the Joint Small Grants Programme for Operational Research in Tropical Disease. For details, please visit the programme’s website: http://www.wpro.who.int/sites/mvp/tdr/.
Activities of the Publications Unit, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

Over the decades, WHO has become recognized as a leader in the field of scientific, technical and medical publishing. The Organization produces publications designed to meet the needs of Member States at all levels of development. Its publications are made available in print, as well as on the WHO website and through online content aggregators.

In the Western Pacific Region, WHO’s Publications Unit actively produces publications on various subjects in collaboration with technical programmes. To ensure that these materials are disseminated widely, the Unit promotes and sells publications at book fairs, selected meetings and conferences. The most recent book fairs attended by the Unit were the 26th Manila International Book Fair held from 31 August to 4 September 2005 in Manila, Philippines and the 17th New Delhi World Book Fair held from 27 January to 4 February 2006 in New Delhi, India.

The Publications web page (http://www.wpro.who.int/publications/) is regularly updated. All publications and documents produced by the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific are published online and can be downloaded for free.

Another activity initiated by the Publications Unit is the “Western Pacific Regional Office Blue Shelf (WPRO Blue Shelf)”. It is a collection of at least 20 of the most recent titles published by the Regional Office and distributed (free-of-charge) to selected medical libraries. The books are updated every six months and the replaced books become the property of the host library. Initially, the “WPRO Blue Shelf” project is being pilot-tested at four selected medical libraries in the Philippines, namely, the University of the Philippines’ General Hospital Library, the Department of Health’s Epidemiological Center Library, Fatima University’s School of Medicine Library, and the University of the East Ramon Magsaysay’s Medical School Library. The project will be launched in other countries of the Region in collaboration with WHO country offices. For more information, please email PUB_Unit@wpro.who.int.

Newsletter submissions

If you have an interesting article, event and/or activity pertaining to health information, health research or knowledge management, which you want included in the newsletter, please e-mail it to: HIN_Unit@wpro.who.int.
SARS caused more fear and social disruption than any other diseases of our time. While it killed a relatively small number of people, it nevertheless buckled economies, crippled international trade and travel, and emptied the streets of some of the world’s most prosperous cities.

Where did this frightening disease come from? How did it spread? And will the world be any better prepared if it returns? For the first time, these and other questions are answered in this remarkable inside account of what really took place in those fateful months of 2003 when severe acute respiratory syndrome threatened to engulf the world.

Written largely by the public health experts and scientists who were at the centre of the battle, this book tracks the ways in which the virus spread, how close it came to bringing public health systems to their knees and how, in the end, an unprecedented global coalition stopped it in its tracks.

For health specialists, this book will serve as an indispensable guide to the science of SARS, providing a detailed account of the clinical symptoms associated with the disease, the unravelling of the genetic secrets of the SARS coronavirus and the development of vaccines and diagnostics.

This book is published by the World Health Organization’s Regional Office for the Western Pacific, where 95% of the more than 8,000 global cases took place and where 12 countries or areas were hit, some with devastating force.

World Health Organization, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific
2006, x + 307 pages [E]
ISBN 92 9061 213 4
US$ 36.00. In developing countries: US$ 18.00
Order no. 15200082