Poor research practices hampering health work, WHO warns

MANILA, 17 August 2011—The World Health Organization (WHO) today expressed disappointment that there is often a lack of relevant evidence to guide important clinical and programme decisions.

"Systematic reviews tell us time and again that the evidence base is inadequate," WHO said.

The stakes are high and the need for credible evidence on what works is urgent, as many countries are still struggling to achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals, which set out targets for 2015.

One of the problems was that many countries—particularly in the developing world—have inadequate governance and management systems for health research. These countries cannot provide an overview of the research activity or track and monitor research portfolios or investments in health research, WHO said.

"This makes it difficult for important stakeholders, such as funders, users and researchers themselves, to set priorities and take steps to reduce duplication, non-reporting of findings and wasted resources," WHO said.

"All too often, data generated during public health research, even when publicly funded, are treated as the property of individual researchers instead of being made available to a wider public health audience," WHO said.
WHO issued the warning as experts from around the Organization's Western Pacific Region gathered in Manila, Philippines, to review research practices and wider access to public health research data.

WHO recommended that, as a first step, countries should establish a web-based, open-access national health research registry that requires registration of all health research, covering at least publicly funded work. Countries should also work towards systematic preservation of data generated during publicly funded health research.

"Much can be done to improve the overall governance and management of health research," WHO said. "And this, in turn, can improve the credibility, transparency, efficiency and quality of research. The result is better health outcomes."