Background

Improving access to essential medicines is central to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Strategies to improve affordability of medicines and procurement and reimbursement policies can enhance coverage and improve access.

In the Asia Pacific Region, all countries face similar challenges in many aspects of ensuring access to medicines: getting value for money when purchasing medicines and in improving medicines’ affordability to health systems and patients. In addition, reducing high out-of-pocket spending through improved policies and strategies for more efficient pricing and procurement is a main goal.

The Access to Medicines under Universal Health Coverage in the Asia Pacific Region network was founded in 2014 with annual network meetings to bring together policy-makers from national authorities responsible for pharmaceutical policies; to exchange information and strengthen collaborations on how to improve access to medicines in the Asia Pacific Region. The Network is a joint initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific and South-East Asia Regions and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and OECD Korea Policy Centre, with support from the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Systems and Financing at Seoul National University.

The Fifth Meeting was organized with experts from 19 countries of the WHO Western Pacific and South-East Asia Regions to exchange information and share experiences on medicines pricing, procurement and reimbursement policies and strategies, including, systematic approaches to exchange price information, price control mechanisms and more efficient price negotiations. Officials from public procurement, national health insurance and regulatory agencies participated.

Meeting Objectives

1. Facilitate the exchange of information and experiences on the use of pricing, procurement and other policies, tools, skills to expand access to essential medicines;
2. Share information on managing medicines prices and ensuring affordability to improve access, especially on low-middle income country settings, including high price innovative therapies;
3. Develop knowledge and skills to improve efficiency of procurement and price negotiations;
4. Promote exchange of experience between countries on the policies and strategies used to lower prices & make medicines more affordable.
Overview of programme:

Day 1. Global and regional updates and review of Asia Pacific pharmaceutical policies for improving access
- Access to medicines: a changing agenda regionally & globally
- Opportunities for getting better value & better coverage
- Options for improving price transparency

Day 2. Moving forward: what actions are needed and feasible within and across countries to get better prices?
- Progress, challenges and lessons learned in countries
- Strategies to address challenges individually & collaboratively
- Ways forward on collaboration via this network

Together we will enhance access to essential medicines and medical products, and advance Sustainable Development Goal 3 and the imperative that underpins it: universal health coverage.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh
Regional Director
WHO South-East Asia Region

The shared goal of better access to medicines in the Asia Pacific Region can be achieved by strengthening the capacity of this regional network.

Mr Ho-Young Maeng
Director General Health & Social Policy Programme, OECD Korea Policy Centre

More effective service coverage should result in real health gains... We must broaden our perspectives and think out-of-the-box to view access to medicines in a bigger picture.

Professor SooMan Kwon
Seoul National University
WHO Collaborating Centre
Health Systems & Financing

Participating countries:

Bangladesh
Bhutan
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
China
India
Indonesia
Lao PDR
Malaysia
Maldives
Mongolia
Myanmar
Nepal
Philippines
Republic of Korea
Singapore
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Timor-Leste
WHO South-East Asia Region (SEAR)
WHO Western Pacific Region (WPR)
COUNTRY SPOTLIGHTS

Bangladesh
- Lower-middle income country
- Strong manufacturing base for quality generics after 1982 National Drug Policy, including price fixation policy
- 98% medicines demand met by domestic manufacturing; low prices, GMP compliance

Malaysia
- Upper-middle income country with mixed health system
- National Medicines Policy and Patient Assisted Scheme to procure high cost medicines
- 2018 pooled procurement across 3 Ministries
- Lower priced Sofosbuvir (anti-hepatitis C) purchased under compulsory license from Egypt for government use
- Consumer price guide: http://www.pharmacy.gov.my
- Medicines price monitoring survey (public v. private)

Philippines
- Lower-middle income country with mixed health system
- Share of total pharmaceutical expenditure: public (15%) & private (85%)
- Universal Health Care Bill - 2018 updates:
  - Service delivery: require access through primary care, consolidate providers into networks for referrals
  - Key policies: HTA required for public funds, central price negotiation, generics-only prescribing, conflict of interest rules
- Drug Price Reference Index: https://dpri.doh.gov.ph/

Republic of Korea
- High income country with single-payer national health insurance
- Population coverage has been achieved and benefit package expanded since 2013
- Reimbursement by economic evaluation - waived for essential & orphan medicines
- Supply issues: disputes from industry to discontinue supply unless government raises price; resulting shortages of essential medicines due to low profitability

Sri Lanka
- Lower-middle income country with universal state-funded free healthcare; still 50% use private sector
- Regulation of retail prices for selected essential medicines; tender capping to reduce price of top 10 products consuming 60% budget
- Market authorization for biosimilar products, increasing generic competition for high price medicines
- >90% patients access anti-cancer medicines through the public sector

Thailand
- Upper-middle income country
- Initiative for Coordinated Antidotes Procurement in the South-East Asia Region (ICAPS) and two pathways of emergency response and joint annual procurement launched 2018

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

- **Global work towards access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all**
  - 2018 Essential in vitro Diagnostic List (EDL)
  - WHO Roadmap for access 2019-2023 will support the access agenda across the entire pharmaceutical value chain:
    - From research and product development
    - Through regulatory processes
    - To appropriate financing and use

- **The Fair Pricing Initiative**
  - Fair Pricing Forum (Netherlands, 2017)
  - Price transparency for all medicines, including total rebates & hidden prices for high cost medicines

- **Health at a Glance Asia/Pacific Publication 2018 updates: [www.oecd.org/health](http://www.oecd.org/health)**
  - Key indicators comparing health status and health system performance
  - High out-of-pocket spending on medicines

- **Impact of trade, intellectual property and regulation on access to medicines:**
  - Transparency of product prices & markups
  - TRIPS flexibilities for originator products
  - South-East Asia Regulatory Network (SEARN) – Information sharing platform

- **Value in pharmaceutical pricing: key lessons from OECD countries**
  - Value-based pricing and other options
  - Guide policies on pharmaceutical spending to increase value ✓ tiered-prices, ✓ rule-based system, ✓ foster competition, ✓ increase transparency to improve trust

- **Challenges of costly new oncology medicines**
  - Anti-cancer medicines are cost drivers; high prices & uncertain and/or marginal benefits

- **Price negotiation of high-cost medicines**
  - Options include: compulsory & voluntary licensing, tiered-pricing, pooled procurement, external reference pricing (ERP), managed entry agreement (MEA), price negotiation, health technology assessment (HTA), post market adjustment

- **Price transparency & using PIEMEDS for price comparisons: [www.piemeds.com](http://www.piemeds.com)**
  - More data shared by countries increases value of platform for authorized users
Ways forward on collaboration via this network

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?**
- **Medicines Prices**
  - How much should we pay?
  - How much can we afford to pay?
- **Price Control**
  - Which medicines?
  - At which point?
  - What mechanisms?
- **Procurement**
  - Tender: for generic medicines
- **Negotiation**
  - Innovator medicines & High cost medicines
- **Competition**
  - Shift the competition space from individual medicines to medicines within the same therapeutic categories
- **Skills**
  - Training
- **Mechanisms**
  - Information/Bilateral
- **Information**
  - Prices paid and rebates
  - Comparative analysis/ cost effectiveness, therapeutic value
- **Tools**
  - Better methodology for collecting data
  - PIEMEDS (to add information on prices innovator medicines and rebates)

**NETWORK OBJECTIVES**
1. Collect and share information on pharmaceutical policies and strategies to generate evidence on the impact of policies to enhance access to medicines;
2. Build institutional and human capacity for effective medicines policy development and implementation of practices under universal health coverage;
3. Exchange information for decision-making, including information on pricing, cost and value of medicines;
4. Share experiences through regular network meetings and/or through suitable virtual communication.

**WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR NETWORK?**
- **Maintain focus on access to medicines.** Proposed value-added of network to facilitate sharing information on pharmaceutical policy (e.g. review implementation of national policies to increase access and affordability of high-cost medicine(s) across network members; highlight policy learning via case studies).
- **Enhance PIEMEDS for price information sharing.** Re-visit process of submitting prices to web-based platform. Focus on priority therapeutic groups (i.e. anti-cancer, injectable antibiotics, hep C, anti-malaria, anti-TB) and develop short price reports.
- **Continue informal networking.** Connect beyond meeting to support each other, share intelligence and experiences.
- **Capacity building.** Conduct price negotiation skills workshop in interested countries.

**Proposed collaborative actions:**
- **Explore collaboration in price negotiation** (in addition to potential for pooled procurement).
- **Link information on price & quality**
  - Explore how price information can be linked to quality information shared via other platforms i.e. SERN Network and Medicines Quality Assurance in the Pacific.
- **Implement Delhi Declaration.** Support implementation of Delhi Declaration actions on information sharing and explore similar Ministerial Roundtable in the Western Pacific Region.
- **Develop price information briefs** on specific therapeutic classes of medicines using PIEMEDS and/or existing publicly available price information.
- **Evaluate what works.** Collaborations on topics, for example:
  - Top 5 medicines country spends most
  - Impact of direct price controls
  - Price volume agreements
  - Managed entry schemes
  - Determinants of out-of-pocket pay on medicines
  - Behaviour of physicians and pharmacists (decision making on prescribing and dispensing of medicines)
  - Benefit package policy making for improved access to medicines
- **Measure progress on access.** Need for better data and clear indicators to monitor access to medicines (e.g. better data on OOP, mobile app for availability and price) – expert consultation.