

Malaria expert panel focuses on access to quality antimalarials

The 13th annual National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) Best Practice Sharing Workshop, focusing on access to quality antimalarials across Africa, convened in Tanzania on 25 June 2014. Key issues include the need for quality-assured antimalarial treatments in both the private and public sectors, as half of patients in Africa buy antimalarials from the private sector, where wide availability of sub-standard treatment is putting patients' lives at risk.



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The gathering provides a platform to discuss and share knowledge and experiences and to drive dialogue around improved health outcomes and access to quality antimalarial treatments for patients in Africa.

For these workshops, Novartis works in collaboration with the Global Fund, WHO, the WorldWide Antimalarial Resistance Network, the Kenya Medical Research Institute-Wellcome Trust, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, US Pharmacopeia, Populations Services International, Ifakara Health Institute and the Pharmacy and Poisons Board.

"These meetings have led to groundbreaking projects such as the development of SMS for Life to improve antimalarial stock management in rural health facilities," said Dr Linus Igwemezie, head of the Novartis malaria initiative. "We believe that by bringing together the best minds and leaders in the field, we can help foster new approaches that will help us ensure all patients have access to quality antimalarials and bring us closer to malaria elimination."

The successful treatment of malaria depends on the public being informed about the risks of the disease, the importance of sleeping under insecticide treated bed nets, and having access to health services including appropriate diagnostic tests and quality-assured antimalarial treatments.

Unfortunately, in some countries bed net utilisation remains a challenge; while sub-standard antimalarials and oral artemisinin monotherapies remain available, primarily through the private sector. These treatments may contain too little or no active ingredient, thereby putting patients' lives at risk.

Speaking on behalf of the WorldWide Antimalarial Resistance Network, Dr Ambrose Talisuna says, "It's crucial that

governments take urgent action to ensure patients are not put at risk of sub-standard treatments. We must make sure that the public is made aware of the importance of taking preventative measures as well. The ongoing role of Novartis in facilitating these workshops provides a platform for discussing these important issues, for sharing best practice in public education and for mapping the sources of poor quality antimalarials."

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