

# MSF to increase access to more affordable vaccine

## STAR HEALTH REPORT

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, international medical organisation Doctors Without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has filed a 'patent opposition' last month, to prevent US pharmaceutical company Pfizer from getting a patent on the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13).

MSF claims this will enable more affordable versions to become available to developing countries and humanitarian organisations. This is the first time a vaccine (biosimilar) patent has been challenged in India by a medical organisation, with the goal of millions more children being protected against deadly pneumonia.

Pneumonia is the leading cause of childhood death, killing almost one million children each year. Currently, pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) are the only two manufacturers of the vaccine, which could prevent a large number of these deaths. Pfizer has priced PCV13 (marketed as Prevenar) out of reach of many developing countries and humanitarian organisations.

It is now 68 times more expensive to vaccinate a child than in

2011, according to a 2015 MSF report, *The Right Shot: Bringing down Barriers to Affordable and Adapted Vaccines*. The pneumonia vaccine accounts for almost half the price of vaccinating a child in the poorest countries.

"The pneumonia vaccine is the world's best-selling vaccine, and last year alone, Pfizer brought in more than US\$6 billion dollars in sales just for this product — meanwhile many developing countries, where millions of children risk getting pneumonia, simply can't afford it," said Dr. Manica Balasegaram, Executive Director of MSF's Access Campaign.

One vaccine producer in India has already announced that it could supply the pneumonia vaccine for \$6 dollars per child (for all three doses) to public health programmes and humanitarian organisations like MSF.

This is almost half the current lowest global price of \$10 dollars per child, which is only available to a limited number of developing countries via donor funding through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

In 2015, all 193 countries at the World Health Assembly passed a landmark resolution demanding more affordable vaccines and increased transpar-



ency around vaccine prices.

The pre-grant opposition — a form of citizen review at the patent examination stage — submits technical grounds before the patent office to show that claims that cover a certain aspect of a drug or vaccine do not merit patenting under India's Patents Act.

An equivalent patent to the one opposed today in India was already revoked by the European Patent Office (EPO) and is currently being challenged in South Korea. Pfizer's patent application involves the methods of conjugating 13 serotypes of streptococcus pneumonia into a single carrier.

"Our pre-grant opposition shows that the method Pfizer is trying to patent is too obvious to deserve a patent under Indian law, and is just a way to guarantee a market monopoly for Pfizer for many years to come," said Leena Menghaney, Head of MSF's Access Campaign in South Asia.

After years of fruitless negotiations with Pfizer to lower the vaccine's price for use in its projects, MSF is challenging this patent application in India to ensure that manufacturers who are planning to produce the pneumonia vaccine do not face key patent barriers at the time of launching a more affordable version.

## HEALTH bulletin



### Common over-the-counter drugs can hurt your brain

From allergies to insomnia, there is a pill for just about every problem. The problem is, those pills often come with a lengthy list of potential side effects. And in the quest to cure what ails us as quickly as possible, those warnings are too often overlooked.

A new study, offers the most definite proof yet of what scientists have known for at least a decade: that anticholinergic drugs are linked with cognitive impairment and an increased risk of dementia.

Though you may have never heard of this class of drug, you have certainly heard of the medications themselves. They are sold over the counter and by prescription as sleep aids and for chronic diseases including hypertension, cardiovascular disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Anticholinergic drug users showed lower levels of glucose metabolism - a biomarker for brain activity - both in the brain overall and in the hippocampus, a region of the brain associated with memory and which has been identified as affected early by Alzheimer's disease.

Of course, never start or stop taking a medication without first consulting your doctor.

## Preventing disease through healthy environments

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

The main message emerging from a new comprehensive global assessment of World Health Organization (WHO) is that premature death and disease can be prevented through healthier environments — and to a significant degree. Analysing the latest data on the environment-disease nexus and the devastating impact of environmental hazards and risks on global health, backed up by expert opinion, this report covers more than 100 diseases and injuries.

The analysis shows that 23% of

global deaths (and 26% of deaths among children under five) are due to modifiable environmental factors. Sixty-eight percent of these attributable deaths and 56% of attributable DALYs could be estimated with evidence-based comparative risk assessment methods, the assessments of other environmental exposures were completed through expert opinion. Stroke, ischaemic heart disease, diarrhoea and cancers head the list. People in low-income countries bear the greatest disease burden, with the exception of non-communicable diseases.

These assessments should add

impetus to coordinating global efforts to promote healthy environments — often through well-established, cost-effective interventions. This analysis will inform those who want to better understand the transformational spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by Heads of State in September 2015.

The results of the analysis underscore the pressing importance of stronger intersectoral action to create healthier environments that will contribute to sustainably improving the lives of millions around the world.



### FACTS ON PREVENTING DISEASE THROUGH HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

- Nearly 1 in 4 deaths across the globe are due to environmental factors.
- Non-communicable diseases cause 65% of environmental-related deaths.
- Deaths from infectious diseases have declined.
- Children under 5 years of age are most affected by the environment.
- Older actors are the second age group most impacted by the environment.
- Low- and middle-income countries bear the greatest share of environmental diseases.
- Environmental impacts are uneven across different social groups.
- Environmental disease burden is preventable.
- Local governance must address environmental health planning.
- Healthy environments greatly contribute to the sustainable development goals.

## HEALTH EVENTS

### Roundtable to observe World Autism Day



Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorder and Autism (IPNA) under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) organised a roundtable meeting to mark the 9th World Autism Awareness Day observed countrywide on April 2, 2016 — says a press release.

Speakers of the discussion emphasised on creating a congenial atmosphere for autistic children in families and school to help ensure their equal participation in society.

### Call for Asbestos free South Asia



The South Asia Strategic meeting on ban of asbestos took place in Brac Inn in Dhaka yesterday. The strategic meeting brought together 20 advocates, activists, victims and trade unionists from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nepal who are working towards a ban of asbestos.

The goal of the meeting is to have focused discussions on building strategies nationally with the sub-region and work on coordinated activities in South Asia in terms of diagnosis, compensation and advocacy working towards a ban in the region.

In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Ban Asbestos Network (B-BAN) since its inception in 2013 has been working on raising awareness, education, identifying affected workers and communities especially in Chittagong and B-BAN has the backing of the regional and global advocates for the complete ban of asbestos in Bangladesh.

### Best poster award in APOA congress



The 19th Asia Pacific Orthopaedic Association Congress was held in Melbourne, Australia recently. Numerous orthopaedic specialists from Asia attended the event. Orthopaedic surgeon Prof. Dr. Md. Shah Alam from Bangladesh attended the congress and achieved the *Best Poster Award* in the spine surgery category.





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