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WHO urges health professionals to engage in tobacco control

31 May: World No Tobacco Day

New survey show lack of training on tobacco cessation techniques

for health- profession students

Geneva - The World Health Organization (WHO) is encouraging health professionals to be proactive in minimizing the problems caused by tobacco addiction, consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke. As a result, this year's World No Tobacco Day on May 31st is dedicated to the important role of health professionals in tobacco control under the banner of '*Health Professionals against tobacco, action and answers*'.

"Tobacco continues to be a leading global killer, with nearly five million deaths a year", notes Dr LEE Jong-wook, WHO Director-General, "The health community plays a key role in the global effort to fight this epidemic. Health professionals are on the frontline. They need the skills to help people stop smoking, and they need to lead by example, and quit tobacco use themselves."

Without additional efforts to implement solutions now, an estimated ten million tobacco-related deaths a year will occur by 2020, most of them in developing countries.

Health professionals, including doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, midwives and others, are trusted sources of information and advice, and are themselves role models in matters related to health. They are in contact with a high percentage of the population and can be instrumental in helping people change their behaviour. Studies show that even brief advice from health professionals can increase tobacco abstinence rates up to 30%. Interventions for smoking cessation led by nurses have shown to increase the chance of successfully quitting smoking by up to 50%

However, data from a newly-released survey by the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (CDC) and WHO shows that a more systematic approach to engaging health professionals in tobacco control is needed, starting with training. The Global Health Professionals Survey was conducted among third year students in four health-related disciplines (dental, medical, nursing and pharmacy) from ten countries. Most students surveyed (between 87% and 99%) believed they should have a role in counselling patients to quit smoking. Over 90% of students across all countries (with the exception of Croatia at 72%) and disciplines think health professionals should get specific training on cessation techniques.

However, as few as 5%, to a maximum of 37% of those surveyed had actually received any formal training.

Smoking prevalence among health professionals is itself often a barrier for their involvement in tobacco control. Seven out of ten countries reported cigarette smoking prevalence greater than 20%, and in 8 out of the 16 surveys, it was over 30%. Prevalence ranged between 0.5% and 47%, the lowest found among nursing students in Uganda and the highest among pharmacy students in Albania.

"It's important for schools, public health organizations, and education officials to work together to provide health professionals with tools to reduce tobacco use among their patients," said CDC Director Dr. Julie L. Gerberding. "As we reflect on the global tobacco control accomplishments during World No Tobacco Day, we encourage all health professionals worldwide to take on their important role in informing patients about the health consequences of smoking and to assist them with quitting."

The preamble of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which became a legally binding treaty on 27 February 2005, emphasizes the role of health professional bodies in efforts to include tobacco control in the public health agenda and to contribute actively to the reduction of tobacco consumption. In January 2004, during a meeting convened by WHO, several health professional associations adopted a code of practice on tobacco control that lists 14 tangible ways in which these associations can engage in tobacco control. For example, the associations and their members should act as a role model for their patients, ensure that workplaces and public facilities are smoke and tobacco-free, and support the political process of tobacco control, including support for the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control among others.

World No Tobacco Day will be launched by WHO and the UK Department of Health in London on Tuesday, 31 May, 2005. Thousands of other national and local activities and celebrations are taking place around the world.

Notes to editors:

Health professionals are doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists, psychologists, psychiatrists, pharmacists, chiropractors and members of other health-related professions.

World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) is celebrated around the world every year on May 31. For more information about WNTD, visit www.who.int/tobacco/wntd .

All materials available on
<http://www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/wntd/2005/en/>

Activities around the world on
<http://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/2005/calendar/en/>

Code of practice on tobacco control for health professional associations:

www.who.int/tobacco/codeofpractice

Current status of the WHO FCTC:

<http://www.who.int/tobacco/framework/countrylist/en/>

The GHPS Pilot Study surveyed students from ten countries across the six WHO regions and four disciplines: Albania (dental, medical, nursing, and pharmacy), Argentina-Buenos Aires (medical), Bangladesh (dental), Croatia (medical), Egypt-Cairo (medical), Bosnia and Herzegovina (nursing), India (dental), Philippines (pharmacy), the Republic of Serbia (dental, medical, and pharmacy), and Uganda (medical and nursing).

For more information on GHPS survey and access to report:

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/research_data/international/wntd2005.htm

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