

D. Bev. Barnett, PWR Guyana
20 April 2011

**PWR's Remarks
Launch of HIVDR Monitoring Survey
Cara Lodge
21 April 2011**

Honourable Leslie Ramsammy, Minister of Health

Dr. Shanti Singh, Program Manager, National AIDS Program Secretariat

Mr. Nicholas Persaud, Care and Treatment Coordinator, National AIDS Program Secretariat

Ms. Barbara Allen, Country Director, CDC, Guyana

Other Colleagues in Health

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning.

First let me offer apologies for Dr. Rosalinda Hernandez' absence – she is on duty travel.

I thank the Ministry of Health for inviting me to make brief remarks on this very important occasion. The launch of the HIV drug resistance monitoring survey in Guyana is coming at a very opportune moment. We celebrated World Health Day on 7 April, and, as you may remember, the theme was “Combat Antimicrobial Resistance – No Action Today, No Cure Tomorrow”.

On that day, the World Health Organization, WHO, unveiled a six-point policy package for all countries to consider in combating antimicrobial resistance. One of the six points is “Strengthen surveillance and laboratory capacity”.¹

In addition, the Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy, which was just approved by the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development, the COHSOD – Minister Ramsammy is the current COHSOD Chair – speaks to the safety and efficacy of medicines, and their sound and cost-effective use. This will involve monitoring for the development of resistance to these medicines.

¹ The others are: Commit to a comprehensive, financed national plan with accountability and civil society engagement; Ensure uninterrupted access to essential medicines of assured quality; Regulate and promote rational use of medicines, including in animal husbandry, and ensure proper patient care; Enhance infection prevention and control (IPC); and Foster innovations and research and development for new tools.

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So, Guyana is in the forefront of compliance with both the WHO recommendations and one of the important principles of the Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy, as it launches the Survey to Monitor HIV Drug Resistance.

Over the years, the Government of Guyana has sought to scale up its response to HIV, in collaboration with partners, among them, I'm pleased to say, the Pan American Health Organization, which is the Regional Office in the Americas of the WHO. There have been many achievements, exemplified by declines in deaths due to HIV infection and transmission of the virus from mother to child. The provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART), along with other treatment, care, and support measures, has prolonged the lives of persons with HIV.

However, with any infection, mutation of the virus, bacterium or fungus – whatever is causing the infection – is possible, and HIV is no different. The chronic nature of HIV infection, and the need for lifelong treatment, makes the development of resistance to some of the antiretroviral drugs used to treat the disease almost inevitable.

The survey that is being launched seeks to raise awareness of the need to prevent HIV drug resistance among people living with the disease who start ART, and to put systems in place to detect such resistance early, if it occurs. The survey will ensure that persons on ART are monitored for factors that contribute to HIV drug resistance.

There are many consequences of drug resistance, including treatment failure, increased health care expenditure, costly second- and third-line treatment, the spread of resistant strains of HIV, and the need to develop new anti-HIV drugs. Therefore, it is critical to prevent drug resistance if at all possible, especially in order to ensure that available resources are used efficiently and effectively. These resources are likely to get less and less, at least from external sources, and Minister Ramsammy has been warning about this in recent times.

Guyana started addressing HIV drug resistance prevention through monitoring the Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) in 2007. Following WHO guidelines, the Ministry of Health implemented an HIVDR EWI monitoring system to assess the extent to which ART programs function to prevent drug resistance. The EWI allow the evaluation of factors associated with HIVDR prevention without the need for laboratory

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testing, and the results of the evaluation provide evidence for public actions to prevent and address HIV drug resistance.

The National AIDS Program Secretariat of the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with PAHO/WHO and other partners, adapted the WHO EWI protocol for specific use in Guyana at selected sites that offer ART.

This survey complements the EWIs, and the launch signals the start of the piloting of the survey in selected ART sites. Experience gained from the implementation of the pilot survey will help to expand the HIVDR survey to other sites in the country, and to more fully integrate the survey into routine HIV prevention and surveillance activities in Guyana.

With the expanded and strengthened surveillance, the ART program will be more efficient and effective, minimizing the likelihood of HIVDR and promoting long-term efficacy of the available first- and second-line treatment.

PAHO/WHO commits to continue its technical cooperation with the Ministry of Health and other partners to ensure that the very useful ART that we currently have at our disposal remains effective. This, in conjunction with other prevention, care, treatment, and support measures, will facilitate continued reduction of the impact of HIV on the people of Guyana. We look forward to the next step in the process.

Thank you.