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Provisional agenda item 14

SMALLPOX ERADICATION: DESTRUCTION OF VARIOLA VIRUS STOCKS

Report by the Secretariat

CONTENTS

| | Paragraphs |
|--|-------------------|
| WHO ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VARIOLA VIRUS RESEARCH | 1–9 |
| ACTION BY THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE | 10 |
| | Page |
| ANNEX: World Health Assembly resolution WHA55.15..... | 3 |

WHO ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VARIOLA VIRUS RESEARCH

1. The WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research was established pursuant to resolution WHA52.10 (1999) which authorized temporary retention of existing stocks of variola virus at the two current locations¹ up to, but not later than, 2002 and subject to annual review by the World Health Assembly. The resolution also requested the Director-General to appoint a group of experts to establish what research, if any, must be carried out in order to reach consensus on the timing of destruction of variola virus stocks.
2. In resolution WHA55.15 (2002, attached herewith), the World Health Assembly authorized the further temporary retention of the existing stocks of live virus for the purpose of enabling further international research on the understanding that all approved research would remain outcome-oriented and time-limited, and its accomplishments and outcomes would be periodically reviewed. The resolution requested the Director-General to continue the work of the Advisory Committee and to report annually to the WHA, through the Executive Board, on progress in the research programme and relevant issues.
3. This document provides a summary of the progress in research with live variola virus which was considered at the Advisory Committee's seventh meeting (Geneva, 10–11 November 2005), following the previous meeting in 2004.
4. Considerable progress has been made in the development of improved, safer vaccines; sensitive, specific diagnostic tests; and in sequencing of entire genomes of viruses from numerous different strains. Based on this, the WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research concluded that no further research requiring access to live variola virus was necessary for these purposes.
5. Progress has also been achieved in the development of antiviral agents, and cidofovir and its analogues continue to be most promising compounds. However, to date, no compound is licensed in any country for the treatment of smallpox. In addition, two new antiviral agents for smallpox have been identified and are being further evaluated. Efficient testing in vitro and in refined animal models is necessary in order to license at least two compounds.
6. The WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research is currently reviewing all proposals for research using live variola virus through a specified format, continues to ensure that research is conducted in an open and transparent manner, and promises that research outcomes and benefits are made available to all Member States.
7. The membership of the WHO Advisory Committee and the representation of advisers and observers at Committee meetings have been balanced geographically. The Secretariat will ensure a more substantial representation of public health experts for the next meeting.
8. The Secretariat acknowledges that there is no consensus among Member States on a proposed new date for the destruction of variola virus stocks. The Secretariat also acknowledges that it is not possible to predict how long the research on antiviral drugs will take.
9. During the Fifty-ninth Session of the World Health Assembly in May 2006, a working group tried to reach a consensus on the draft resolution by the intergovernmental meeting called for that purpose on 5 April 2006. Though time was too short, significant progress was made. The Secretariat encourages Member States to improve the draft through bilateral and multilateral

¹ Russian State Research Centre of Virology and Biotechnology, Koltsovo, Novosibirsk Region, Russian Federation, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America.

negotiations so that an acceptable resolution can be presented to the Executive Board in January 2007.

ACTION BY THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

10. The Regional Committee is invited to note the above report.

FIFTY-FIFTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

WHA55.15

Agenda item 13.16

18 May 2002

**SMALLPOX ERADICATION: DESTRUCTION OF
VARIOLA VIRUS STOCKS**

The Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly,

Recalling resolution WHA52.10 on smallpox eradication;

Having considered the report on smallpox eradication;¹

Noting that the research programme will not be completed by the end of 2002,

1. DECIDES to authorize the further, temporary, retention of the existing stocks of live *Variola virus* at the current locations specified in resolution WHA52.10, for the purpose of enabling further international research, on the understanding that steps should be taken to ensure that all approved research would remain outcome-oriented and time-limited and periodically reviewed and a proposed new date for destruction should be set when the research accomplishments and outcomes allow consensus to be reached on the timing of destruction of *Variola virus* stocks;
2. REQUESTS the Director-General:
 - (1) to continue the work of the Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research with respect to the research involving *Variola virus* stocks and to ensure that the research programme is conducted in an open and transparent manner;
 - (2) to ensure that regular biosafety inspection of the storage and research facilities is continued in order to confirm the strict containment of existing stocks and to ensure a safe research environment for work with *Variola virus*;
 - (3) to ensure that research results and the benefits of this research are made available to all Member States;
 - (4) to report annually the progress in the research programme and relevant issues to the World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board.

Ninth plenary meeting, 18 May 2002
A55/VR/9

¹ December A55/21