

WHF Statement on Agenda Item 8.3 – Access to Medicines

Honourable Chair, distinguished delegates,

The World Heart Federation welcomes the inclusion of access to medicines as a cross-cutting issue on the SEARO health agenda.

A reliable supply of medicines is vital to the management of chronic diseases, and people living with cardiovascular disease (or CVD) suffer acutely from poor access. Research shows that nearly 70% of CVD patients in LMICs do not receive medicines to manage their condition, a figure rising to over 80% for patients in low-income countries.¹

Many of these essential CVD medicines appear on both the WHO and national Essential Medicines Lists and are cost-effective, such as the generic drug Benzathine Penicillin G (or ‘BPG’).

Monthly injections of this drug in rheumatic fever patients can prevent progression to rheumatic heart disease (or RHD), reducing the need for expensive and traumatic heart surgery. The prevalence of RHD in the SEARO region remains high: in 2013, the Global Burden of Disease study estimated that women alone account for over 6.5 million RHD cases in South Asia.

Yet despite the potential of BPG to save money and lives, a number of SEARO Member States have experienced shortages or raised concerns about the quality of BPG available due to adverse reactions among patients.²

In June this year, the WHO Executive Board recommended a draft resolution on rheumatic fever and RHD for discussion at next year’s World Health Assembly, offering a unique opportunity for a coordinated global response. However its recommendations, including implementation of primary and secondary prevention programmes, require a reliable supply of high-quality BPG.

Therefore to support the Region’s ongoing efforts, we make the following recommendations:

1. **Increase funding for essential cardiovascular medicines within national health budgets**, especially those outlined in Appendix 3 and the WHO PEN Package, such as BPG.
2. **Establish pooled procurement mechanisms within the SEARO Region for NCD medicines**. This approach has proved effective in securing affordable and high-quality NCD medicines in other WHO regions.³
3. **Support the Draft Resolution recommended by the Executive Board on ‘Rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease’**, which urges stakeholders to ensure timely, reliable and affordable access to essential medicines.

The World Heart Federation reaffirms its commitment to collaborating with SEARO Member States to support access to cardiovascular medicines.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21872920>

² http://rhdaction.org/sites/default/files/RHD%20Action_Global%20Status%20of%20BPG%20Report_Online%20Version.pdf

³ http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12163%3Apaho-strategic-fund&catid=8775%3Aabout&Itemid=42005&lang=en