Global antimalarial drug resistance network launches reference standard and quality assurance scheme

Oxford, UK; 30 April 2010: A new initiative to assure and improve the quality of pharmacology and in vitro data from laboratories investigating patient responses to antimalarial drugs has been launched by the WorldWide Antimalarial Resistance Network (WWARN). The network has been set up to map the emergence and spread of resistance to antimalarial drugs so that global efforts to control the disease are founded on reliable information.

Laboratories participating in the WWARN Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) initiative will receive reference standards and will be eligible to take part in a proficiency testing programme. WWARN will also assist and advise laboratories to solve any quality or methodological issues that may be highlighted.

Malaria treatment may fail for many reasons, aside from parasite resistance. For example, the drug may be poorly absorbed or have unusual properties in the individual patient, or the dose may be insufficient for therapeutic effect. Quality assured laboratory studies will play a critical role in both understanding antimalarial resistance and determining appropriate responses.

“With signs that malaria parasites in certain regions of South East Asia may be developing resistance to our most effective drug treatments, we must be confident that laboratory data correctly represents the current situation in the field”, explains Dr Niklas Lindegardh, Director of the WWARN Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) Programme.

Malaria is preventable and treatable, yet one million people die from malaria each year, most of them children under five years of age. More than 40% of the world’s population are at risk of the disease. These people mainly live in the poorest countries of the world and are least likely to have access to effective control methods, including supplies of safe, quality-assured medicines. Prevention of infection is one important facet of malaria control, but with no effective vaccine against malaria, treatment relies on antimalarial drugs. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that the emergence of resistance to these drugs is a crucial problem, which could seriously undermine efforts to control the disease.

Dr Philippe Guérin, Executive Director of WWARN comments, “WWARN is working in close collaboration with the World Health Organization’s Global Malaria Programme. We will collate and harmonize methods to compare pharmacological, laboratory and genetic measures of parasite drug resistance, in parallel with the clinical responses to treatment. Since small changes in one or more of these factors may provide early warning of emerging resistance, it is absolutely critical that data are trustworthy, robust and comparable with researchers in other locations around the world.”

Further information about the QA/QC scheme can be found on WWARN’s website at www.wwarn.org.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About WWARN

WWARN aims to establish a global collaboration to ensure that anyone affected by malaria receives efficacious and safe drug treatment, providing geographically relevant and timely, quality-assured intelligence on a web-based platform to track the emergence and spread of antimalarial drug resistance. Developing and building strategic collaborations with the World Health Organization, Ministries of Health in endemic countries and other organisations and stakeholders involved in tackling malaria, WWARN will promote training and build sustainable capacity in malaria endemic countries to strengthen the collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of high quality data on antimalarial drug resistance. WWARN also provides a forum for global exchange of scientific and public health information on antimalarial drug resistance. Oxford University will provide the necessary IT infrastructure and software for sharing datasets on this scale.