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Strengthening the response to noncommunicable diseases in central Asia and eastern Europe

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Report of the meeting

Strengthening the response to noncommunicable diseases in central Asia and eastern Europe

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CONTENTS

Page

Welcome and self-introduction	1
Outline of the meeting	1
Presentation on the global action plan and monitoring	1
Presentation on the regional action plan and noncommunicable disease toolset	2
Presentation on regional health systems actions and toolset	2
Plenary discussion on networking and scope for intercountry action on noncommunicable diseases.....	3
Process of implementing noncommunicable disease plans with WHO support	4
Closing session	4
Recommendations.....	4
<i>For WHO</i>	5
<i>For participating countries</i>	5
Annex 1	6
Annex 2	7

Welcome and self-introduction

The countries participating were Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, represented by health ministries or other associations and academic institutions. WHO was represented by headquarters, the Regional Office for Europe and the Country Office in the Russian Federation. Participants introduced themselves, expressing their appreciation for the possibility of technical, political and financial support and conveyed their shared responsibility for implementing programmes.

Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, welcomed participants and emphasized the importance of this meeting, the first gathering of the members present. He referred to noncommunicable diseases as a global priority accepted at the United Nations level. Through the prism of the WHO reform, which emphasizes results-based management with priority given to country-level outcomes, headquarters, the Regional Office for Europe and the WHO country offices are prepared to assist in implementation, but the countries themselves must achieve sustainable results.

Outline of the meeting

Gauden Galea, Director of the Division of Noncommunicable Diseases and Health Promotion, WHO Regional Office for Europe, initiated the meeting by describing the measures of this meeting's success:

- to remind participants about the ongoing global and regional processes on noncommunicable diseases;
- to recognize the basis for cooperation with eastern Europe and central Asia, within the countries and across countries, acting as a network; and
- to understand country by country the necessary focus level, scope of support and need for collaboration from WHO on items including country assessment for national noncommunicable disease strategies, policies and action plans.

Presentation on the global action plan and monitoring

Oleg Chestnov made the first presentation, underlining the significance of the global process on preventing noncommunicable diseases and reviewing the political processes since 2000. The Director-General of WHO has requested Member States to develop and submit the WHO action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases for 2013–2020 for consideration and possible adoption at the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly. Further, in response to the Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, a set of indicators and voluntary global targets must be developed within the monitoring framework and targets for preventing and controlling noncommunicable diseases.

In accordance with the collective decision of Member States taken at the World Health Assembly in May 2012 to adopt a global target of reducing premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases by 25% by 2025, Oleg Chestnov reminded the participants that the

consultation process is still ongoing. Although the first draft will be submitted to the WHO Executive Board in January 2013, countries were persuaded to participate in the second informal consultation with Member States and United Nations agencies, to be held on 1 November 2012, and were asked for more direct communication. Countries were informed that each WHO region has appointed a regional coordinator in Geneva for implementing the noncommunicable disease agenda. This year, Alexei Kulikov is the coordinator for the European Region.

Presentation on the regional action plan and noncommunicable disease toolset

Gauden Galea spoke of the importance of developing a regional toolset. Given the variety of tools that have worked in other countries in the European Region, discussion should be promoted on how to replicate similar tools and extend the experience to countries in central Asia and eastern Europe. The success of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation in rapidly reducing their mortality rates from circulatory diseases was noted as evidence that the global goal is achievable and that there is a need to focus even more on country-related deliverables in the coming years of the noncommunicable disease action plan.

The action plan for implementation of the European Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2012–2016 launched in 2011 is a key tool, enabling all actors to be as practical as possible. The action plan introduces elements that can be measured and tested in 2016. Countries must therefore confirm the high quality of national plans or at least have one ready by 2013.

Questions were raised for discussion on ways to maximize the participation of countries in central Asia and eastern Europe in the global consultation process and on ways to build the capacity of these countries for noncommunicable disease surveillance. How might we organize country assessments, risk factor surveys and national action plans in our collaboration during the coming years? Then possible areas of support from WHO or across the Region were suggested:

- to promote health in all policies through such means as fiscal policy, marketing foods to children, packaging and advertising of tobacco and alcohol, salt reduction, working through regulation, voluntary action by industry and public persuasion;
- to improve disease management and clinical prevention in primary care, including modernizing technology, revising guidelines and improving access to care; and
- to develop guidelines integrating multiple risk factors as a secondary prevention tool.

Presentation on regional health systems actions and toolset

Hans Kluge, Director of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe, made a presentation on the topic of regional health systems and how they work towards preventing and controlling noncommunicable diseases. Stronger health systems are urgently needed to tackle noncommunicable diseases, especially in the countries of eastern Europe and central Asia. In accordance with the new approach to health system strengthening, this can be achieved by identifying the country-specific health outcomes, best buys and health system bottlenecks. In the coming years, noncommunicable disease work will focus on country assessment, a noncommunicable disease action plan, high-level policy round-tables and technical assistance.

Delivering universal primary care services for noncommunicable diseases and the distinctively developed practical tools will help countries to move towards a systems perspective. The following tools were mentioned for strengthening health system capacity and health services:

- web-based tool for countries to assess the stages of health system capacity and services;
- tools for reorienting health services towards preventing and providing care for people with noncommunicable diseases based on primary health care, including continuum of care;
- developing an implementation strategy for integrated health survey delivery (practical guidelines for ministers);
- health funding tools (two courses in Barcelona, Spain);
- health system governance (a tool on health system performance);
- translating the toolset into the Region and relating the tools to the vertical character of noncommunicable diseases; and
- a comprehensive country assessment model (health system and public health approach).

Plenary discussion on networking and scope for intercountry action on noncommunicable diseases

The presentations were followed by interventions from the countries that addressed several important issues and recommendations for the Region as a whole.

- Health information is important. Examples were brought up from Kazakhstan, which adopted the Demographic and Health Surveys, and Uzbekistan, where the STEP survey was used for risk factors. Local teams should be trained in all countries in the Region to have similar surveys for data collection.
- The skills barrier among health personnel needs to be reduced by creating a Russian-language resource. Provision of essential documentation and training in noncommunicable diseases was a common regional request.
- A new target group is emerging – the Internet, including Facebook and social networking – and this is a key focus for preventing noncommunicable diseases. These tools should be used fully, creating online databases and online surveys. Kazakhstan brought up examples of its database ZdravKZ, which was modelled on WebMD.
- Focused policy dialogues are important for bringing together the various actors, such as the tobacco, alcohol and food industries.
- The roles of nurses need to be redefined to coincide with preventing and controlling noncommunicable diseases, and general practice needs to be reoriented to also focus on noncommunicable diseases.
- Law and practice need to be balanced, and the law needs not only to be adopted but also enforced. Examples were brought up, also looking at the possible side effects.

Process of implementing noncommunicable disease plans with WHO support

Several options for technical support from WHO were outlined:

- conducting a national assessment focused on noncommunicable diseases and health systems;
- providing national consultation and/or international experts for developing a national strategy, policy and action plan;
- strengthening regional activity via: (a) policy dialogue and exchange networks; and (b) using regional interaction as a resource for skills, training and translating evidence into Russian;
- carrying out a risk factor survey for those who do not have data; and
- conducting a remote review of existing documents.

This list of options will not apply to all countries, but each country should start with a country assessment. The results of implementation must be visible by end of 2013.

Closing session

The floor was open for discussion and reflections. Dmitry Borisov, Executive Director, Equal Right to Live Non-Profit-Making Partnership, was invited to discuss the experience from implementing social projects, which cover the institutions that the government does not, such as private clinics. The social organization uses the public health approach, combining the professional sphere with the public interests. They work with academe and other sectors to, for example, improve the economic models of health care.

The need to move from vertical to integrated programmes, to integrate the surveillance efforts for various diseases and to increase the taxation of risk factors are all steps forward to tackle the global noncommunicable disease epidemic. The public and private sectors must be combined to improve capacity and information, such as using sales data for the consumption of alcohol and food or data from private health services. We must work together with no conflict of interest, integrating the various actors in national responses to noncommunicable diseases and creating a successful model.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made during as an outcome of this meeting:

- Extend the platform of the All-Russian Cancer Forum and devote an entire day to a meeting of members from eastern Europe and central Asia.
- Use the Gastein Forum as a future platform for public organizations and nongovernmental organizations.
- Make country presentations on “Europe day” at the 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion: health in all policies in Helsinki, Finland, 10–14 June 2013.

For WHO

- Resend information on consultation process to Member States.
- Provide assistance to countries in developing their requests for WHO support.

For participating countries

- Identify a national focal point on noncommunicable diseases.
- Have a country representative attend the second informal consultation with Member States and United Nations agencies in Geneva, Switzerland, on 1 November 2012.
- Identify the need for assistance in reviewing or developing a national noncommunicable disease plan.
- Send a letter within 10 days to the local WHO country office with the request for identified assistance from WHO.
- Finalize the project description by the end of October 2012.

Annex 1

AGENDA

The agenda of the meeting was as following:

- Welcome by **Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health**, and self-introduction of participants.
- Outline of meeting by **Gauden Galea, Director of the Division of Noncommunicable Diseases and Health Promotion, WHO Regional Office for Europe**.
- Presentation of the global action plan and monitoring framework by **Oleg Chestnov**.
- Presentation of regional action plan and noncommunicable disease toolset by **Gauden Galea**.
- Presentation of regional health systems actions and toolset by **Hans Kluge, Director of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe**.
- Plenary discussion on networking and scope for intercountry action on noncommunicable diseases.
- Process of implementation of noncommunicable disease plans with WHO support and working group on national needs by **Oleg Chestnov** and **Gauden Galea**.
- Feedback from working groups and conclusions on prospects for regional and national collaboration in 2013–2014.

Annex 2

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