



# An Ounce of Prevention...

Of the many health challenges facing the world, including HIV/AIDS, Avian flu, and the nursing shortage, *Imprint* presents a brief look at other global health issues affecting the world community.

In his keynote address at NSNA's 53rd Annual Convention in Salt Lake City, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard Carmona stated, "The country needs to convert from embracing treatment to embracing prevention. When we prevent health problems, we will have more money for the undeserved."

Prevention is not only vital to the future of U.S. healthcare but to the world. Millions of people die worldwide due to preventable or at least, manageable diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), diarrhoeal diseases, including cholera, kill almost 2 million people every year, most of them children under five. Of the 396 million cases of malaria reported worldwide, 1.3 million people die yearly and again, 90% of those are children (WHO Fact Sheet, 2004).

## "Health 101" and Vaccine Immunization

Currently, no vaccine exists to prevent malarial infection as current treatments enhance the immune system before contraction rather than attacking the disease directly. An ideal vaccine would limit the damage to a patient's system since total immunity would be nearly impossible to achieve for many reasons, including the parasite's complexity (Malaria Vaccine Initiative, ND). However, malarial infection could be significantly reduced with what has been referred to as "Health 101" measures by many healthcare professionals,

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including Dr. Lee Jong-wook, Director-General of the WHO (WHO Fact Sheet, 2004).

The same is true for a series of diseases, including Japanese encephalitis, trachoma - which visually impairs over 6 million people worldwide - and various intestinal disorders. Access to safe water sources and basic sanitation would save millions, but often developing countries lack the means and infrastructure to make the relatively "basic" changes that could save millions. The 2003 United Nations World Health Report stated that "the main causes [of death] among children are depressingly recognizable: the perinatal conditions closely association with poverty; diarrhoeal diseases; pneumonia and other lower respiratory tract conditions, and malaria."

While basic sanitation would not completely eradicate the conditions above, its consistent implementation would

mean a radical change in the living conditions of the world's poorest populations. As would having an effective means of vaccination dispersal to treat diseases that have been virtually eradicated in the industrialized world but continue to wreak havoc in the developing world.

Jean-Pierre Le Calvez, Team Leader Advocacy & Communications at the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), notes that of the 120-125 million children born in the world every year, 27 million are unvaccinated. As a result, 2-3 million die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases.

## Working towards a solution

GAVI is a partnership made up of various non-governmental organizations, associations, and others including WHO, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), dedicated to reducing the mortality rate of children under the age of five by providing life-saving vaccines. The partnership is dedicated to meeting the targets spelled out by the Millennium Development Goals Project, an ambitious worldwide program headed by the United Nations, which targets the reduction of poverty and disease as two of its eight goals. (To read more about the UN's Millennium Project visit [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)).

If the project achieves its 2015 targets, 500 million people will be lifted from poverty, and over 30 million children will be saved. GAVI focuses on bringing new and under-used vaccines to the developing world that have been available in industrialized countries for several years, if not decades. The alliance also helps countries to build their health system infrastructures so that immunization and other health interventions are possible.

“Health system strengthening is one of GAVI’s priorities,” Le Calvez says. As such, the organization and its partners have kept abreast of the world wide nursing shortage.

“The human resources crisis is on our radar. Without personnel, be it nurses, or doctors, it’s very hard to deliver any kind of healthcare intervention,” he adds.

At the same time, he is hopeful that the Millennium Project will make a difference to millions throughout the developing world. “I think there have been unprecedented commitments towards healthcare and towards development,” he says.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Le Calvez notes, estimates that aid from G8 countries will increase from \$80 billion in 2004 to \$130 billion by the end of the decade.

“It’s not just talk, we have to make sure that commitments are kept and that implementation with the funding is as efficient as possible.” It could make the difference between life and death for millions.

While the worldwide scope of poverty and disease can be overwhelming, it is important to remember that as future nurses, you will be making a difference in "your corners" of the world. When nurses advocate for patients in the U.S. they are also doing their part to advocate for patient health care worldwide - as such, nurses must remain aware of the health issues that affect their colleagues worldwide. ☺

## references

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**Larisa C. Mendez, MA, is Managing Editor for Imprint.**

