Malaria Initiative: Capacity building

Empowering patients and healthcare professionals

Increasing access to medicines in developing countries is not just a matter of buying drugs and distributing them. It is also about building capacity on the ground by bringing together training in good clinical practice, malaria case management, logistics management and other types of expertise to ensure optimal health impact.
Sharing best practices at workshops

In 2006, we introduced best practice sharing workshops in malaria-endemic countries in order to contribute to the strengthening of healthcare systems in those countries.

Best practice sharing workshops bring together representatives of national malaria control programs (NMCPs) to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices between countries, highlight successes and challenges and explore solutions to malaria prevention and treatment.

Over the past 10 years, fourteen workshops have been held in Africa, with topics ranging from case management to utilization of rapid diagnostic tests and ACTs, public awareness campaigns, forecasting, distribution, stock management, and malaria elimination challenges. A prime focus at NMCP workshops has been the collection of data from the field to quantify the impact of new malaria policies. In 2015, malaria experts from countries across Africa convened in Mozambique at the 14th NMCP workshop to explore innovative strategies to move from malaria control to elimination.

Groundbreaking projects have emerged from these workshops. For instance, NMCP managers requested that Novartis make its treatment packaging less voluminous. The resulting redesign substantially reduced the packaging size, making transport and storage more efficient.

In addition, NMCP managers voiced the stockout issue, which led to the development of SMS for Life.

Furthermore, the availability of an ACT specifically for children was also a key discussion topic during NMCP workshops while Novartis and Medicines for Malaria Venture had initiated a collaboration to develop Coartem® Dispersible.

Building capacity on the ground

Building capacity is a cost-effective and sustainable means of advancing health and development in developing countries.

We contribute to capacity building in malaria-endemic countries through the clinical studies we conduct on the ground. For instance, we have over 10 years of experience in training individuals in these countries about Good Clinical Practice (GCP), a pre-requisite for them to meet internationally-recognized standards for clinical trials and become self-reliant in the conduct of trials. Patients are also positively impacted by these good practices as they learn to recognize malaria symptoms and seek medical assistance when needed.

The SMS for Life program is an excellent example of how we are helping communities adopt best practices in disease management. Led by Novartis, this public-private partnership uses mobile phones, tablet PCs and electronic mapping technology to help eliminate stock-outs of essential medicines in Africa and increase access and quality of care in rural areas. The system helps to maintain adequate drug supplies in public health facilities through regular and timely reporting of stock levels and disease surveillance. SMS for Life 1.0, the phone- and SMS-based version, has been rolled out in more than 10,000 healthcare facilities in sub-Saharan Africa, including more than 3,000 facilities in Cameroon. Further, the solution is now being used to track rapid diagnostic tests, bed nets, health data and blood supplies. It also tracks availability of medicines against leprosy and tuberculosis. An enhanced version called SMS for Life 2.0, based on tablet computers, has improved functionality and can track more stock items as well as more disease surveillance indicators. The platform will also be used to deliver high-quality training to health workers directly at their health facility. SMS for Life 2.0 is currently under advanced discussions for implementation in Gabon, Nigeria and Zambia.

Cultivation of Artemisia annua, a crucial plant in the composition of Coartem® and Coartem® Dispersible, has emerged as an important cash crop for thousands of farmers throughout China and Madagascar. The creation of a guarantee pool with critical support from Novartis helps farmers avoid “boom and bust” cycles, making cultivation of Artemisia annua sustainable. Further, technology transfer to Chinese companies has allowed them to meet international quality standards in the production of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, and register their facilities with stringent drug regulatory authorities such as the Australian health authority.

Since 2010, Novartis has been participating in a fellowship program supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the WHO and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations. Every year, we have been welcoming developing country researchers to Novartis to help promote high quality clinical research in malaria-endemic countries. Through our Next Generation Scientist Program for post-graduate students, we also train African scientists and clinicians in different research fields, including malaria.
Educating and training healthcare personnel and communities

Novartis has an ongoing commitment to the education of healthcare workers and the communities they serve.

Initiatives have included courses for nurses and other dispensing staff in health facilities, as well as for community health workers. We have also developed workbooks to educate health workers about malaria, foster a dialogue with patients and train other co-workers. These materials have been subject to extensive field testing in rural Africa by social scientists led by the University of Oslo. These studies showed high levels of acceptance in the target audience. Translated into several languages, the materials help to promote patient adherence through a better understanding of the treatment regimen by healthcare workers. This knowledge is then passed on to patients, their mothers or caregivers. Several NMCPs have integrated these materials into their own programs.

In addition, we produced a booklet specifically for children and their families. Using images for readers with low literacy levels, the booklet has also been translated in several languages.

In Uganda, together with the Scort Foundation, The Football Club Social Alliance and the Ministry of Health, the Novartis Malaria Initiative is working to educate the young generation about malaria, the country’s leading cause of sickness and death. Booklets telling the story of a young girl named Tatu who is fighting malaria were distributed to “young coaches” to help them explain malaria prevention, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment to their communities. The Football Club Social Alliance counts world-renowned partner clubs including FC Basel 1893 in Switzerland. In another initiative in Mozambique with the Peace Corps Volunteers, we supported the distribution of Tatu booklets to more than 2,000 mothers and children as part of the Stomp Out Malaria program.

Novartis partners with the Global Fund to expand access to ACTs and stop the use of monotherapies in the private sector of malaria-endemic countries. Since 2010, more than 100 million Novartis treatments, including 58 million Coartem® Dispersible treatments, were provided through this channel known as the Private Sector Co-Payment Mechanism. As part of this collaboration, we are supporting local access partners in providing education and training to accredited retailers in the correct use, safe storage and supply of our treatments.
In an effort to complement these efforts, the Novartis Malaria Initiative launched its own program in 2012 to expand access to ACTs in the private sector of malaria-endemic countries. The program is also designed to teach private suppliers and patients how to use the medicines properly.

The Novartis Foundation and partners are working to assess the impact of Targeted Parasite Elimination, a promising new strategy to empty the “reservoir” of malaria parasites in a population at high risk for malaria in the Zambezi region in Namibia. Through strengthening capacity in malaria surveillance and response, the program aims to treat cases and their close contacts to interrupt transmission.

**The Novartis Malaria Initiative**

For over a decade, the Novartis Malaria Initiative has been a pioneer in the fight against malaria. Focused on treatment, access, capacity building and R&D, the initiative is the largest access-to-medicine program within Novartis measured by the number of patients reached annually. Together with our partners, and with our continued patient-centric approach, we are committed to the common goal of malaria elimination.

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