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Welcome to the first issue of the netSPEAR newsletter.

netSPEAR is an independent project hosted by the KEMRI / Wellcome Trust Collaborative Research Programme in Nairobi, Kenya. netSPEAR is funded by **GAVI** and the **PneumoADIP**. Pneumococcal disease is a leading cause of deaths from meningitis and pneumonia in African children and these are potentially preventable with new vaccines. Whether these vaccines are used in Africa will depend, however, on whether the costs of the vaccines can be justified by the number of cases of disease and deaths prevented. Surveillance data to help address this issue is urgently required from East Africa and netSPEAR, a network that aims to work with all health sectors in the region, is attempting to facilitate the collection of this routine public health information

netSPEAR began in August 2003 with the appointment of a manager and an administrator to work supervised by a volunteer steering committee. Highlights of the first months of its activities included:

Pneumococcal ADIP investigators meeting on Surveillance of laboratory confirmed pneumococcal disease Mombasa, Kenya, 22 – 24 September 2003

Mombasa, Kenya was host to a unique international conference on invasive pneumococcal disease surveillance. The meeting was organised by WHO Department for Research on Bacterial Vaccines (BAC) and brought together several networks from Africa and Asia that included:

netSPEAR, WHO AFRO PBM (Paediatric Bacterial Meningitis) surveillance project based in Harare, the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) based in Seoul, Korea, IBIS-SAPNA (Invasive Bacterial Infection Surveillance: South Asia Pneumococcal Alliance), coordinated from Chennai/ Vellore, India & ICDDR-B Centre For Health and Population Research, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

WHO Geneva was represented by Dr Thomas Cherian and the PneumoADIP team from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health was lead by the Executive Director Dr. Orin Levine. The main objectives highlighted by Dr Levine were:

- ✓ Standardizing definitions and procedures across surveillance networks
- ✓ Collaboration between networks and PneumoADIP
- ✓ Determining ways in which the PneumoADIP can help surveillance networks become more successful

**netSPEAR Foundation Conference on Surveillance of pneumococcal disease in the East Africa Region
Nairobi, Kenya, 16 – 19 November 2003**

Nairobi, Kenya was the venue for the netSPEAR foundation conference. All parties with a role to play in preventing major childhood disease were invited. Participants included officials from the Ministries of Health, the donor community, Academic institutions, health workers from both public and private health institutions in the East African region, WHO AFRO among others. We give special thanks to Dr. Monique Wasunna Director Centre for Clinical Research, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) for opening the foundation meeting.

The objectives of netSPEAR foundation conference included

- ✓ Recognising the value of public health surveillance for invasive pneumococcal disease and Haemophilus Influenzae type b disease in children.
- ✓ Building consensus on clinical case definitions for meningitis and pneumonia
- ✓ Development of standard operating procedures for the microbiology laboratories
- ✓ Promoting internal and external quality assurance
- ✓ Discussing what is needed from a surveillance site.
- ✓ Examining ways in which netSPEAR can provide support to participating sites
- ✓ Invitation to stakeholders to participate in the surveillance
- ✓ 'State of the art' presentations on pneumococcal vaccines and the role of GAVI and the pneumoADIP.



Dr. Monique Wasunna opening the netSPEAR conference.

During the roundtable meeting Dr Brendan Flannery, a CDC epidemiologist, gave a talk on the role of surveillance in monitoring disease due to Hib in the United States. Dr Shabir Madhi an investigator with the South African clinical trial (see below) presented and discussed the findings of the clinical trial featuring both HIV positive and negative children. The existing WHO AFRO PBM sites, private hospitals and some research organisation had an opportunity to present their existing data on meningitis and pneumococcal disease incidence in the region.

The conference ended with a clear commitment to improving surveillance in the region. A Steering Group was formed and Dr. Mike English was elected to the chair while the netSPEAR Administrator Beverly Watila was elected as secretary. It has been agreed that membership will expand to include several member countries' representatives. More information on the conference, the presentations and background documents can be found at www.netspear.org.

Major African Study on a Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine - published by The New England Journal of Medicine on October 2, 2003. <http://www.nejm.org/>.

A clinical trial of the 9-valent Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine in nearly 40,000 South Africa children has demonstrated that the vaccine strongly protects against invasive

pneumococcal disease and reduces cases the number of X-ray confirmed pneumonia by about 20% in children without HIV infection. The vaccine is active but less effective in those infected with HIV.

GAVI Executive Secretary Dr Tore Godal visit to the East Africa.

GAVI executive Secretary Dr. Tore Godal visited Kenya and Tanzania in November 2003. During the visit in Kenya he held meetings with the Ministry of Health and the ICC for Kenya. He also visited Kenyatta National Hospital the only existing WHO AFRO PBM site in Kenya accompanied by senior MOH, WHO Kenya office and UNICEF Kenya office officials, during the visit he had an opportunity to visit the paediatrics filter clinic, children's wards and the microbiology laboratory in the hospital. He also had an opportunity to discuss this PBM site data as well as Kilifi District Hospital data presented by one of the netSPEAR Project Leaders, Dr Mike English. He emphasised the need to carry out surveillance to monitor the effectiveness of the new vaccine and contributing factors to observed vaccine failure.

netSPEAR would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners and we look forward to working with you!

This newsletter was produced by Beverly Watila, netSPEAR administrator.



Feel free to ask for more information or send netSPEAR your news to:

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