

Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation awards nine grants to support care for patients with Hepatitis B and C in India and China

15 December 2014 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation today announced nine new grants totaling more than \$3.5 million to strengthen efforts in India and China in the fight against hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection by focusing on the most vulnerable, high-risk patient populations. The multi-year grants were made through the Foundation's Delivering Hope initiative, which has supported more than 40 projects in India and China since 2002.

These new grants align with the World Health Organization's (WHO) strategies for reducing the incidence of HBV and HCV infection through early diagnosis and screening of high-risk populations, including intravenous drug users and patients co-infected with HIV and/or tuberculosis. Several focus on increasing awareness about disease transmission among health care providers who care for HBV- and HCV-infected patients, who also are considered at-risk for contracting viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis is an urgent public health issue in Asia. In India and China together, it is estimated that more than 123 million people are infected with chronic hepatitis B and about 60 million with hepatitis C. Although progress has been made in introducing national policies to control the spread of HBV and HCV, community and general awareness is considerably low. When left untreated, viral hepatitis infections result in liver failure and chronic liver disease that can create a significant burden on families and society.

"Delivering Hope continues to increase its focus on HBV and HCV in India and China India, the two countries that have the highest incidence of viral hepatitis worldwide," said John Damonti, president, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation.

The Foundation awarded grants for the following projects in India:

• All India Institute of Diabetes and Research - A pilot program in Mehsana and Sabarkantha, two rural districts in the state of Gujarat that have experienced HBV outbreaks, will expand HBV testing in public health care institutions, make vaccinations more widely available through a network of nongovernmental organizations and hospitals.

â€¢ MAMTA - Health care providers, including doctors, nurses, lab technicians and others who come into direct contact with hepatitis patients, will receive training in HBV and HCV risk assessment, disease prevention and risk management.

â€¢ United Way of Mumbai - To help prevent disease in the hardest-hit and most-at-risk populations, medical interventions and extensive community education will take place in 18 slum areas in Mumbai.

â€¢ SAMARTH - As new grantees join the Foundation's Delivering Hope initiative in India, proper monitoring and evaluation will ensure that program goals are achieved. SAMARTH will conduct training activities to strengthen partners' ability to self-monitor and evaluate their program's progress and provide objective information about program functioning, methodologies, effectiveness and impact, and identify potential gaps.

In addition, the Foundation awarded a grant to the World Hepatitis Alliance to develop a new model of patient group creation aimed at physicians who treat viral hepatitis and engage them in creating and sustaining patient support groups. These groups play a large role in advocacy efforts that have changed health care policies and practices for a range of diseases around the world.

The World Hepatitis Alliance will develop an e-learning tool comprised of a video course and a text-based tool kit that will focus on the importance of advocacy to promote viral hepatitis awareness and prevention, the need for patient groups to be integral to advocacy, advantages to physicians of having strong patient groups, provide information about creating a patient group and supporting existing groups and map out support available from the World Hepatitis Alliance and other sources.

These learning materials will be housed on the World Hepatitis Alliance website and will be available to be hosted on other websites, including those operated by major international hepatology societies, to ensure wide distribution. The project will include China and India, but is more broadly aimed at the world.