

Medicus Mundi International

Meeting: Seventy-first World Health Assembly (A71/1)

Agenda Item: 12.8 Rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease

Statement:

MMI takes this opportunity to address agenda 12.8. This statement is supported by PHM.

We commend the DG report and urge the Assembly to adopt the EB's proposed resolution that comprehensively paves the way forward for effective prevention, control and elimination of Rheumatic Heart Disease. Despite incomplete data, we know there are at least 33 million individuals living with RHD. Most of these cases are confined to vulnerable and marginalised groups (including children, adolescents, pregnant women and poor and indigenous peoples). We would like to emphasise that the burden of RHD worldwide rivals that of other high profile public health priorities such as HIV and malaria and thus undeniably deserves the same level of focus and attention.

We are greatly encouraged by the previous support from over 20 member states for prioritising this topic on the agenda and hope this transcends to a dedicated and coordinated effort across all MS to implement the resolution. We urge MS to ensure the continuous supply of quality-assured and affordable penicillins as well as a prioritised research agenda aimed at developing a long-acting penicillin formulation (to improve adherence) and a (group A streptococcal) vaccine. This must go hand-in-hand with an overall focus on strengthening health systems and health equity, oriented around primary health care, to address the root socio-economic determinants of this disease of poverty.

Finally, we emphasise the importance of a rhetoric that is inclusive of both refugees and migrants. This preventable disease is thriving in overcrowded refugee settlements and thus the health needs of these communities cannot be ignored. Of the 1 million asylum seekers who arrived in Europe in 2015, approximately 10,000 are expected to have RHD. The problem is large and it is spreading and hence global action is required to eliminate RHD once and for all.