

FINAL REPORT TO UNEP: SSFA WITH HEALTH CARE WITHOUT HARM (HCWH) : A 40,000 USD PROJECT FUNDED BY THE USEPA

### **“Phase-out of Mercury Fever Thermometers and Blood Pressure Devices in Healthcare in Brazil and South Africa”**

The project was undertaken as part of the WHO-HCWH Mercury-Free 2020 initiative, a component of the UNEP Mercury in Products Partnership. It utilized the WHO guidance for ministries of health on the implementation of the Minamata Convention as it relates to thermometers and sphygmomanometers and other materials developed both by WHO and HCWH.

#### **Project specific objectives:**

- a. Support the development of national policies to substitute mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices in South Africa.
- b. Support the development of national policies to substitute mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices in Brazil.

### **BRAZIL**

#### **Activities undertaken:**

Since 2008, Projeto Hospitais Saudáveis (PHS) has been working in partnership with HCWH advocating the phase out of medical devices containing mercury in healthcare and in home use.

Aside from advocacy action directed at the general public, environmental agencies, public health organizations and governmental authorities, the strategy has been focused on awareness of healthcare organizations about the risks of mercury and how they could lead by example the feasibility of the phase out.

Earlier in 2010, assisted by PHS, the state government of Sao Paulo issued an act prohibiting thermometers and sphygmomanometers with mercury and restricting the use of dental amalgam in all health facilities in the public health care system. As Sao Paulo is the more populated State in Brazil, this act had a considerable influence in other States. Consequently in January 2014, a State Law was approved banning any kind of medical device with mercury in São Paulo.

The project, in partnership with local organizations, and continuing efforts from 2010 till 2014, conducted awareness campaigns in 10 regions. Today, the situation is quite good on the South and Southeast regions, but there is still a lot to be done in the North, Midwest and Northeast.

Brazilian federal government signed the Minamata Treaty, is yet to ratify the Convention. PHS campaign has the approval and support from important areas in Ministry of Health, but there were also areas at the government that seem to tend to postpone concrete action towards the elimination of mercury in health care. Thus the strategy was to focus on collecting information to support a national plan for a mercury ban.

With collaboration of the environmental health department of MoH and many other partners among healthcare organizations, universities and local and regional

governments, PHS invested in an online survey that covered the whole country to raise information about the following issues:

- Current stage of the substitution process
- Annual expenditure on thermometers and sphygmomanometers (with or without mercury in last 2 years)
- Current prices of thermometers and sphygmomanometers in the region
- Availability of mercury-free products in the region
- If there are end-of-life mercury devices stored in the facility
- Availability and costs of disposal services (storage) for mercury devices in the region

Based on data from the survey, a national action plan was developed and served as basis by decision-makers in the phase out of mercury medical devices. The action plan brings information to the public and government on the feasibility and affordability of alternatives to mercury added products in the health care sector.

**Project Output in Brazil:** A national policy for the elimination and substitution in the health care sector that garners broad support from the health care sector in the country. This policy supports Brazil's on-going ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Activities undertaken:**

Below is a summary of activities HCWH South Africa partner organization groundWork had with the NDoH on this Mercury Phase Out project

A series of meetings and exchanges with the National Department of Health over the issue of phasing out mercury in health care was conducted. At the first meeting, Luqman Yusufu met with 2 representatives from the Environmental Health Directorate, National Department of Health – Ms Flavia Masekwameng and Mr. Ramsook Loykisoona and presented the proposal from groundWork, to assist them to develop a National Action Plan to Phase out Mercury in Health Care.

### **Recommendations and Actions from Meeting**

- Phasing out Mercury was nothing new to the department as they have already developed a guidance document to phase out mercury devices in health care and this was shared with [us](#).
- The development of a steering committee would be useful in driving the whole process forward and this would include members from the provincial departments of health.

The second meeting was with Luqman Yusufu and Rico Euripidou and the Chief Director – Aneliswa Cele and her staff (Flavia Masekwameng). Rico presented the proposal and explained the activities that the funding could provide for (e.g. technical expertise for the workshop, including logistics).

Due to the slow engagement by the National Department of Health, the Provincial Health Departments were instead engaged to develop the provincial action plans.

**Project Output in South Africa:**

Provincial action plans for the elimination and substitution of mercury in the health care sector are in place that:

1. Officially acknowledges the new Convention on Mercury, and its implications for the health sector.
2. Promotes that financial support including foreign aid is sourced to implement this initiative
3. Approves that technical and capacity building assistance is sourced from the WHO/HCWH initiative, the UNEP products partnership, the private health sector and other interested nongovernmental organizations and,
4. Motivates the development of a National Action Plan with a guiding steps document that is to be followed by the national department of health, provincial departments of health, municipal departments of health in eliminating and substituting mercury in the health sector (NAP developed and executed in the second phase, 2015 – 2017).

The project in Brazil and South Africa provided information to the respective national governments that will enhance their ratification process of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

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