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1. News from HAIAP

1.1 Record of HAIAP Forum 'Health Action for All - the way ahead' May 27-29 in Penang

We are developing a full record of the HAIAP Forum that was held in Penang in May 2023.

Many of the presentations are already available on the HAIAP website. It is a 'work in progress' as we add to the record of the proceedings.

<https://www.haiasiapacific.org/events/haiap-forum-penang-may-27-28-2023-health-for-all-the-way-ahead/>

Brochure:

<https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/HAIAPPenangConferenceBrochure-1.pdf>



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2. Information sharing

2.1 Malaysia Tobacco Bill and E-nicotine

Poisoned Toddler Now Poster Child In Fight Against Nicotine Delisting

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak

By CodeBlue | 8 June 2023

<https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2023/06/08/poisoned-toddler-now-poster-child-in-fight-against-nicotine-delisting-prof-dzulkifli-abdul-razak/> See also <https://www.tobaccocontrolaws.org/legislation/malaysia>

It is humbling to read that the health minister has apologised for the breakdown of a lift in Melaka Hospital recently.

Those affected must be impressed with such an emphatic gesture, demonstrating the humane dimensions of a care provider who often has little time to share in making a living. It saw how a patient using a ventilator was carried down the staircase as a result. Thankfully, the lift was quickly fixed, given the intervention by the minister.

That said, one wonders if the case of a two-year-old toddler being initially suspected (now confirmed) of nicotine poisoning due to vaping would deserve similar attention.

Although it is not as direct as the mechanical lift breakdown in Melaka, it nevertheless has to do with a decision breakdown – failure to be accountable democratically and ethically – that toddler episode epitomised. That is, unilaterally delisting nicotine from the Poisons List under the Poisons Act 1952.

It has caused numerous nicotine-related poisoning cases involving vape being reported. Unlike the toddler who 'innocently' used the gadget, many others voluntarily buy them after being allowed post April 1, 2023.

This abuse of nicotine, according to the All Alliance Parliamentary Group – Sustainable Development Goals, in their recent findings, is rapidly on the rise.

So too are comments by the special adviser to the health minister on the increasing occurrences of Evali (e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury) cases following the April decision breakdown. The link is no mere coincidence.

Worse, because the disease is so new, the course of the illness is unpredictable. In the United States, among the cases reported, 96 per cent of patients required hospitalisation, including some who have died.

Weighing on this was World Health Organization (WHO) director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who, at the global body's weekly media conference, said that electronic cigarettes (vapes) are a trap to recruit children, not part of harm reduction.

'When the tobacco industry introduced electronic cigarettes and vaping, one narrative they really tried to sell is that this is part of harm reduction. It's not true. It actually is a trap, meaning kids are being recruited at the early age of 10,11,12 to do vaping and e-cigarettes,' said Tedros in one of the sharpest rebukes of the industry yet.

Children are attracted to e-cigarettes and vaping because they think that it is cool, and it comes in different colours and flavours.

'Then they get hooked for life and most actually move into regular cigarette smoking,' said Tedros, who also stressed that e-cigarettes and vaping were also harmful to health in themselves.

He appealed to WHO member states, Malaysia in particular, to regulate e-cigarettes and vaping to protect their citizens.

Based on this narrative, it does imply that Malaysia, facilitated by decision breakdown, has fallen into the trap, when nicotine was hurriedly delisted from the Poisons List! It has, as alleged by WHO, been attracting children of all ages without any more safeguards.

This is in stark contrast to the US Food and Drug Administration's action in issuing warning letters to 30 retailers for illegally selling unauthorised tobacco products.

'The unauthorised products were various types of Puff and Hyde brand disposable e-cigarettes, which were two of the most commonly reported brands used by youth e-cigarette users in 2022,' according to the FDA.

The FDA further emphasises that 'protecting our nation's youth from tobacco products – including disposable e-cigarettes – is a top priority for the FDA'.

It has been more than two months since the deadly decision, and likely longer before the new Bill is approved, if at all. Meanwhile, more children and adolescents are risking their life, regardless!

As noted by *CodeBlue* earlier, the tobacco bill – whose passage through the House is far from certain – will continue to legitimise e-cigarettes and nicotine vapes to be sold to children and teenagers in Malaysia below the age of 18.

At the same time, a number of business organisations are lamenting the fact that they were not consulted, with fears of another round of bulldozing forced on them.

Categorically, regulations or restrictions on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, nicotine content, flavours, sales channels, or product packaging and labelling are being compromised as Malaysia's current tobacco control regulations under the Food Act 1983 exclude e-cigarettes and vape.

As such, we must echo the Consumers' Association of Penang to 'urge the Health Ministry to take immediate steps to ban chemical vape liquids, which are sold openly in many shops and roadside stalls without any control'.

'The ministry should not waste any time to save the young generation from damaging their lives on poisonous nicotine liquids, which are sold to them as fruit flavours.'

Thousands of children, between age six and 12, are at risk of being vape-aholics, through no fault of their own.

The writer is the recipient of the 2023 Tobacco Control Award.

[The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) hopes Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will re-list nicotine under the Poisons Act immediately for the sake of the people's health. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/06/919774/mma-wants-pm-flip-flop-and-re-list-nicotine-under-poisons-act>]

See also

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm#search/in%3Asent+haniki%40ium.edu.my/CllgCJfmqxLzmlxGGvzRgTPDKwrjQszmshZXrCXjtsSVKwdjkhFJMZTQzvkvDMjqQWPNWblGRL?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

Conclusions: Vaping was the strongest risk factor for smoking, and vice versa, suggesting there is not a straightforward, unidirectional relationship between vaping and smoking in young people. Young people appear to be readily accessing nicotine vaping products, which are often disposable and flavoured, through both social and commercial channels.

Implications for public health: Stronger enforcement of federal and state policies designed to protect young people from vaping products is urgently needed.

and

Australian Government Tobacco Plan <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/taking-action-on-smoking-and-vaping>

'The Budget will include \$63m for a public health information campaign to discourage Australians from taking up vaping and smoking and encourage more people to quit. There will be \$30m invested in support programs to help Australians quit, including through enhanced nicotine cessation education and training among health practitioners.'

and

Australian Government National Tobacco Strategy 2030

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-tobacco-strategy-2023-2030>

E-nicotine in all forms is only available on prescription and strict controls are in place to prevent illegal import

2.2 Sri Lanka NMRA lacked professor in pharmacology for months

[With thanks to Dr Manuj Weerasinghe]

https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/NMRA-lacked-professor-in-pharmacology-for-months/108-262061

29 June 2023 by Kalani Kumarasinghe

Sri Lanka's drug regulator has functioned without a Professor of Pharmacology to offer guidance in making crucial decisions for the past few months, Senior Consultant Physician Dr. Ananda Wijewickrama charged.

The state regulator, the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA), requires the expertise of professors and specialists in each field of medicine when making decisions concerning public health, Dr. Wijewickrama explained, speaking to the Daily Mirror.

'There must be a Professor in Pharmacology in this Authority to advise on this speciality. But over the past few months, there were no professors from the Pharmacology field appointed to the authority,' he said.

Meanwhile specialist doctors in surgery and gynaecology too have not been appointed to the NMRA, he said.

The senior consultant cautioned that decisions made by an authority which lacks specialists' supervision may be inaccurate, as the authority does not receive the expert consultations.

Commenting on the sudden transfer of 23 senior pharmacists to the ministry with immediate effect, Dr.

Wijewickrama said, 'Transfers made in this manner, would only cause the downfall of this establishment. These attempts at sabotage are extremely dangerous.' Asked if the Ministry has communicated the reasons for this transfer, Dr. Wijewickrama said that he was not aware of such a development.

At a media briefing organized by the Sri Lanka Medical Association Dr. Wijewickrama also noted of the NMRA's arbitrary imports of various medicines into the country without evaluation. "Citing emergency requirements, various drugs were imported to the country in the past, without an assessment of quality, safety or efficacy," he said.

Dr. Wijewickrama said that even after the lapse of six months in 2023, Sri Lankan health authorities are still challenged with a shortage of medicines. 'This is not just a concern for us doctors, but also the public who are inconvenienced,' he said.

Authorities have continuously cited a lack of funds, which has now been resolved, Dr. Wijewickrama said. 'On the one hand there is severe mismanagement within the regulatory body, and therefore unregulated drugs are being imported to the country,' he charged.

2.3 Lancet June 2023

Whole text: <https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LancetBackslidinginCovidAgreementJune2023.pdf>

2.3.1 Lancet Backsliding on human rights and equity in the Pandemic Accord

A May 22 draft of the WHO convention, agreement, or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, or the Pandemic Accord, was leaked, reported on, and published by Health Policy Watch on May 24, 2023.³ Further negotiations are expected until the final pandemic treaty is announced, probably at the World Health Assembly in 2024. The May 22 leaked draft has evoked strong criticism from human rights and health equity advocates on the grounds that text on the right to health and equity seems to have been removed or weakened by the INB.

Although it is not easy to track and document all the changes made to the earlier zero draft version, cutting across the entire document are a number of fundamental concerns. Crucially, the final Pandemic Accord will need to not only protect equity and human rights in pandemic prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery of health systems, but also set the pathway for global health more broadly.

2.3.2 Lancet UHC. Improving access to medicines for non-communicable diseases, including mental health conditions

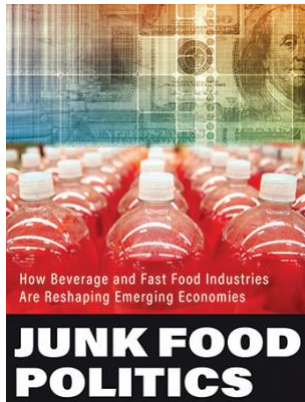
Whole text: <https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LancetImproving-Accessmedsfor-NCDxJune2023.pdf>

At the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage at the UN General Assembly in 2019, global leaders made a commitment to set targets to prevent and control non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) conditions. At that time, focused actions were proposed to improve access to essential medicines for NCDs, supported by WHO, including leveraging the WHO Model Lists of Essential Medicines to develop and update national essential medicines lists, developing further normative guidance, establishing and using prequalification programmes, advocating for affordability and fair pricing, enhancing demand forecasting, and expanding pooled procurement, guided by global strategic frameworks and WHO technical guidance.

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced substantial disruptions, including stock-outs of essential medicines and limited access to health facilities in many settings. In 2025, global leaders will meet again at the UN General Assembly to discuss progress towards combating NCDs and MNS conditions, including towards the nine voluntary global NCD targets. The global community must take bold, decisive, and sustained action between now and then to achieve meaningful progress, and thereby save and improve hundreds of millions of lives over the next decade.

2.3.3 Lancet - Book: Political complicity in junk food industry tactics

Whole text: <https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LancetPoliticalComplicityJunkFood.pdf>



Junk Food Politics: How Beverage and Fast Food Industries Are Reshaping Emerging Economies Eduardo J Gómez Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023 pp 408, US\$54.95 ISBN 9781421444284

'Gómez insists that government complicity has meant that 'junk food politics is a two-way street. Industries and governments' interests have collided in mutually reinforcing and beneficial ways. But this has occurred at the expense of impairing the health and prosperity of our most innocent and vulnerable populations'.'

Fear and opportunity partly underpin the tactics of the beverage and food industries. Sales of sugar-sweetened beverages, for instance, have fallen by about 25% during the past 20 years in many high-income countries (HICs). To counteract such a decrease in sales in HICs, companies have focused their attention on opportunities in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is the backdrop to Eduardo J Gómez's compelling book *Junk Food Politics: How Beverage*

and Fast Food Industries Are Reshaping Emerging Economies, which looks at six country case studies from China, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa.