



Health Action International Asia Pacific (HAIAP)
(in collaboration with USM TWN DMDC IIUM)



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1. News from HAIAP

1.1 HAIAP activities

On 15 February 2024, Beverley Snell and Niyada Angsulee Kiatying met with Malaysian colleagues in Penang. There was detailed discussion and planning for expansion of the **USM School of Pharmacy curriculum** in line with the recommendations by Tan Sri Dzulkiﬂe Abdul Razak. See page 17 in the HAIAP News December 2023.

<https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/HAIAPNewsDec2023.pdf>

Community projects/studies around antimicrobial resistance (AMR) will be undertaken during 2024 and during **World Antimicrobial Resistance Awareness Week** (the third week in November) the results of those studies will be reported at an event in Penang to be jointly organised by HAIAP, USM, TWN, CAP with the support of the Ministry of Health of Malaysia, along with the presentation of the winning videos and their Awards.

The HAIAP Catalyst Video Competition will be run again this year and the publicity has already been prepared by Dr Hadzliana Zainal (USM).

(See details about the video competition this year

<https://www.haiasiapacific.org/what-is-on/>

A description of last years three winners can be seen here <https://www.haiasiapacific.org/events/haiap-forum-penang-may-27-28-2023-health-for-all-the-way-ahead/> Scroll to the end of the report.

and the three winning videos can be seen.....

<https://youtu.be/iThaso5K-kl>

<https://youtu.be/eYks0YyPv4A>

<https://youtu.be/QpnoYRHRhek>

1.2 HAIAP Website <https://www.haiasiapacific.org>

According to our 'statcounter', there are very few visits to our site.

The HAIAP website is intended as a source of information about our history, interests, battles and activities, and includes all issues of our publications, eg HAIAP News and monthly Bulletins as well as records of major events.

It is also a 'library' of significant useful publications from all sorts of sources.

Clearly the website must be more user friendly and we will work on that.

Also it must be more **visible**.

We are asking our colleagues to visit the website and have a good look around. We have some ideas how to make it tidier and more user friendly (and we are getting onto that) but we would very much appreciate your ideas too.

Also, if you are involved with other organisations please could you get a link to HAIAP included on their site if possible. **Health Action International Asia Pacific (HAIAP)** <https://www.haiasiapacific.org>

Let's see if we can become more visible and useful.

2. Information sharing

2.1 Care of antimicrobials in Kerala

The following tweet was shared by a colleague

@theliverdr

'Today I went to three pharmacies and asked for over the counter Amoxicillin antibiotic. All three pharmacists refused because I did not have a prescription. I told them I am a doctor. They still refused, because I did not have a prescription. I was really happy. This is Operation Amrith by Kerala Government and it's already in full force. The Kerala State Health department plans to completely stop over-the-counter sale of antibiotics without prescriptions by the end of 2024. The State Drugs Control department launched Operation Amrith (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention for Total Health) to check antibiotics abuse in the State. I wish all the very best for this life saving endeavour.'

The Hindu describes *Operation Amrith*

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/operation-amrith-to-check-antibiotics-abuse-in-kerala/article67710239.ece>

Health department plans to completely stop over-the-counter sale of antibiotics without prescriptions by the end of 2024

January 05, 2024 09:11 pm | Updated January 07, 2024 12:03 pm IST - Thiruvananthapuram

The State Drugs Control department will launch *Operation Amrith* (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention for Total Health) to check antibiotics abuse in the State.

This initiative is implemented with public participation. People can pass on information on pharmacies selling antibiotics without prescription to the Drugs Control department, a statement issued by the office of the Health Minister said on Friday on Friday. This initiative will be an example of participatory antimicrobial stewardship, wherein the public can play a major role.

A special squad deployed by the Drugs Control department will be covertly monitoring the sale of antibiotics.

Pharmacies will have to store the correct details of antibiotics they sell. Pharmacies will also have to display a board on the premises that antibiotics will not be sold without prescription. Those pharmacies which sell antibiotics without proper prescriptions from clinical practitioners will have to face strict action, the statement said.

The Health department is on a drive to completely stop over-the-counter sale of antibiotics without prescriptions by the end of 2024. Irrational use of antibiotics can adversely affect the health of a person, apart from the fact that it can lead to microorganisms which are resistant to antibiotics.

The World Health Organisation considers antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to be a silent pandemic. It is estimated that if the current levels of antibiotics abuse continue undeterred, by 2050, AMR would have claimed at least one crore lives across the globe.

The Health department is also planning initiatives to create awareness amongst the medical fraternity of the dangers of AMR and to persuade doctors not to prescribe antibiotics unless necessary.

The public needs to be aware that unnecessary use of antibiotics without a doctor's prescription as well as consuming antibiotics without following the proper dos and don'ts can also lead to AMR.

2.2 Countering misinformation

Research has shown that misinformation shared online during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to people behaving in ways that increased transmission and mortality, such as not wearing masks, forgoing vaccination or relying on ineffective medicines to treat infection. These dynamics affected public health efforts to protect communities from COVID-19 and ultimately cost lives. The publications shared here come from USA but they do reflect global experience.

2.2.1 Tax records reveal the lucrative world of COVID misinformation

Washington Post, 21 February 2024

https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Tax-records-covid-misinformation_21Feb24_Washington-Post.pdf

This Washington Post article looks at financing of organisations that spread misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics and reveals that peddling misinformation is a lucrative business. The writers show that four major non-profit organisations rose to prominence during the coronavirus pandemic by capitalising on the spread of misinformation and collectively gained more than \$118 million between 2020 and 2022, enabling the organisations to deepen their influence in statehouses, courtrooms and communities across the country. It is quite a long complicated article but well worth a read.

There were 2500 comments on the article - a wide range. Do have a look.

<https://www.haiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Comments-Tax-records-reveal-the-lucrative-world-of-covid-misinformation-The-Washington-Post.pdf>

2.2.2 Mayo clinic: Debunking COVID-19 myths

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-myths/art-20485720>

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine reduces the risk of infection with the COVID-19 virus and slows the spread of COVID-19. Also, vaccination can prevent severe illness from COVID-19. But misinformation continues to circulate about COVID-19 vaccines and ways to prevent infection with the COVID-19 virus.

Mayo Clinic staff explain clearly what the science says about COVID-19 vaccine myths, COVID-19 prevention myths, COVID-19 treatment myths, the importance of focussing on facts and the steps you can take reduce the risk of infection.

2.2.3 Health Affairs published *A Systematic Review of COVID-19 Misinformation Interventions: Lessons Learned* <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.00717>

Governments, public health authorities, and social media platforms have employed various measures to counter misinformation that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of those misinformation interventions is poorly understood. *Health Affairs* analysed fifty papers published between January 1, 2020, and February 24, 2023, to understand which interventions, if any, were helpful in mitigating COVID-19 misinformation. They found evidence supporting accuracy prompts, debunks, media literacy tips, warning labels, and overlays in mitigating either the spread of or belief in COVID-19 misinformation. Strategies are suggested for dealing with misinformation and providing appropriate information.

2.2.4 Johns Hopkins University: *National Priorities to Combat Misinformation and Disinformation for COVID-19 and Future Public Health Threats: A Call for a National Strategy*

<https://centerforhealthsecurity.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/210322-misinformation.pdf>

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that health-related misinformation and disinformation can dangerously undermine the response to a public health crisis. Contradictory messaging and active subversion have reduced trust in public health responders, increased belief in false medical cures, and politicized public health measures aimed at curbing transmission of the disease. Setbacks in the COVID-19 response have highlighted that health-related misinformation or disinformation can lead to more infections, deaths, disruption, and disorganisation of the effort. The University calls for a national strategy.

2.2.5 New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst *Combating Misinformation as a Core Function of Public Health February 2023* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9923817/pdf/CAT.22.0198.pdf>

Misinformation has run rampant during the COVID-19 public health emergency, challenging the communication and trust-building efforts of public health and medical professionals. Misinformation remains a driving force behind vaccine hesitancy, leading to calls for action from the U.S. Surgeon General, the World Health Organization, and medical experts. Although health misinformation is not new, it has been exacerbated in this era of 'fake news' and globalised social media. In a 2021 Kaiser Family Foundation survey, nearly 8 in 10 people endorsed or considered a common falsehood about COVID-19. Misinformation has caused harmful societal effects, from reluctance to receive a COVID-19 vaccine or follow masking and quarantining guidance to distrust of and threats of violence against public health workers.

2.3 Industry: Profits over people - Public Citizen

<https://www.citizen.org/article/profits-over-patients/>



A recent [Public Citizen report](#) documents that pharmaceutical companies that manufacture the ten drugs selected for USA Medicare negotiation spent significantly more on self-enrichment of shareholders and C-suite employees than on R&D. The report reveals a pattern of spending on activities such as stock buybacks, dividends to shareholders, and executive compensation, which far surpasses their R&D investments.

Of note, the manufacturers of the first 10 drugs selected for the USA Medicare price negotiation spent \$10 billion more on self-enriching activities than on R&D in 2022. These findings spotlight the industry's prioritisation of maximising shareholder profits over patient welfare and innovation.

Moreover, the report challenges the industry's narrative that reducing profits would impede their ability to invest in new medicines.

It highlights the flawed nature of this claim by showcasing pharmaceutical companies' substantial resources allocated towards activities aimed at enriching shareholders and executives instead of R&D. Despite these excessive expenditures, pharmaceutical companies continue to assert opposition to measures aimed at curbing unreasonable drug prices. The data presented in this report serve as a reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to ensure fair drug pricing and to incentivise innovation in the pharmaceutical sector.

Note: Public Citizen has pointed out the common practice of major innovation taking place in the public sector - in Universities and in government institutions - rather than in the pharmaceutical industry itself.

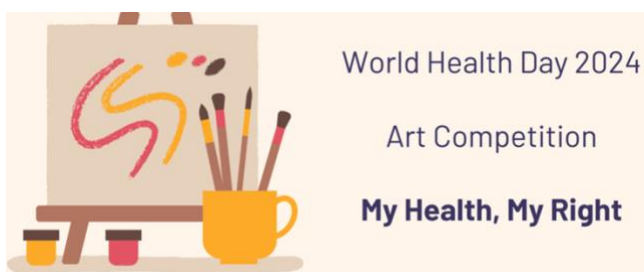
2.4 World Health Day 2024 April 7 'My Health, My Right': Art Competition

News release 23 February 2024

Full details - how to enter, etc:

<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/detail/23-02-2024-world-health-day-2024-art-competition>

To celebrate World Health Day 2024, the World Health Organization South-East Asia Regional Office is organising an art competition on the theme '**My Health, My Right.**'



We invite people of all age groups to share through their artwork how they envisage health as a human right and what health means to them personally.

What does the right to health mean to you? Availability / accessibility / acceptability / quality? What does a human rights-based approach to health look like? Equality/non-

discrimination; participation and accountability?

Take up your brushes, pencils, or digital tools, and shine the spotlight on how everyone regardless of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status is entitled to the highest attainable standard of health.

Don't miss this opportunity to be part of a meaningful movement towards a world in which everyone enjoys their right to health.