

Poonam Singh to head WHO in South East Asia

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Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh takes charge as the WHO regional director for South East Asia from February 01, 2014. She was elected by the 11 Member States of the region in September 2013 and was subsequently appointed by the WHO to its executive board at its 134th session in January 2014. Dr Khetrapal Singh is an Indian national and the first woman to hold this post.

Committing to excellence, Dr Khetrapal Singh said, "It is a great honour to be appointed Regional Director at an important moment in the history of public health and at a time when WHO is undergoing reform."

The South East Asia region is expected to be certified polio free by the WHO in March 2014. "I am steadfast in my resolve to bring change, to explore new avenues and to build partnerships for a technically sound, committed and dynamic WHO to meet each and every public health challenge in South East Asia," added Dr Singh.

Dr Singh served for over two decades as a civil servant in India, as a member of the Indian Administrative Services. She was the secretary health, family welfare and medical education in the State of Punjab, which has a population of 22 million and a health budget of \$350 million.

In 1987 she moved to the health, population and nutrition department of the World Bank. In 1998, she joined WHO headquarters as executive director, sustainable development and healthy environments, and was a member of the cabinet of then director general, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland. Dr Singh served as WHO deputy regional director for the South East Asia region from 2000-13. In February 2013, she joined the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India as advisor for international health, where her principal task was to strengthen global health outcomes and provide guidance to the ministry to take forward the international health agenda.