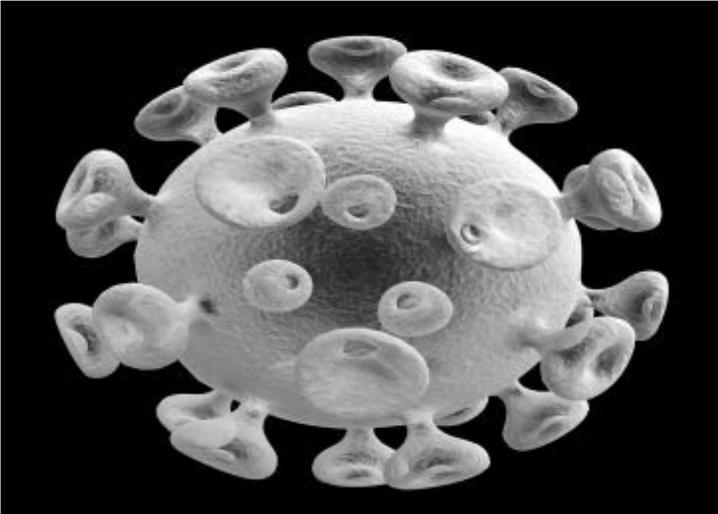


The World Hepatitis Alliance calls for urgent attention

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Recently on World Hepatitis Day, the World Hepatitis Alliance has called for urgent attention to be given to recent figures showing that although viral hepatitis kills as many as HIV/AIDS, the great majority of countries have no programmes in place to tackle it.

'Viral hepatitis is the 8th leading cause of death worldwide, killing as many people as HIV/AIDS every single year' says Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance. '500 million people worldwide are chronically infected. In the face of these numbers how is it possible that viral hepatitis receives so little priority across the world?'

Presently, diseases receive attention and funding depending on their global priority. However the global priority list does not necessarily reflect the real burden of disease. This has led to responses that are disproportionate to disease impact, and has left some diseases tragically under-resourced. Therefore, the majority of governments have failed to dedicate resources to viral hepatitis, even in countries where prevalence is up to 20%.

The Global Report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) this month showed the extent to which viral hepatitis is ignored. Only 37% of countries have a national strategy or plan for viral hepatitis, and less than 30% reported having a department responsible solely for viral hepatitis related activities. The lack of response to the world's 8th biggest killer is truly baffling. Not only does it put millions of lives at risk by allowing this silent epidemic to grow, it leaves the 500 million people who are acutely infected entirely abandoned without support or recognition.

The Global Burden of Disease study released last year in the Lancet shows that viral hepatitis was responsible for almost 1.45 million deaths in 2010, the same as HIV/AIDS and importantly more than TB or Malaria. Despite this enormous annual death toll, leaders in global health consistently leave it off their agendas.

In 2010 the WHO openly recognized that viral hepatitis is a prime cause for concern by making World Hepatitis Day one of only 7 world health days formally recognized by WHO and all Member States. Nevertheless, major changes to the global health point of view are yet to be seen.