

Ministry of Health and «Doctors Without Borders» to host Regional Tuberculosis Symposium for the first time in Ukraine

The Ministry of Health of Ukraine, in partnership Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), will this week host a two-day symposium on tuberculosis (TB). The annual event will be held on **5-6 March 2020. This is the first time Ukraine is leading the symposium, now in its 9th edition.**

TB remains a key health concern for Ukraine. **In 2018, 10 people died of the disease in the country each day.** As the hosting country, Ukraine will re-state its commitment to ending TB and demonstrate its achievements in reaching international goals.

“The ambitious goal to end TB by 2035 requires decisive action and the swift implementation of reforms that will build a truly patient-centered model of TB care. Global issues require global solutions and Ukraine is willing to work together with other countries of the region to achieve this. Namely, we will openly identify our own challenges and mistakes, and we will share our successes in order to develop the most effective approaches to TB prevention, detection and treatment,” **Viktor Liashko, Deputy Minister of Health, said.**

The symposium will explore the successes and challenges in providing TB care in the Eastern Europe and Central Asian region, bringing together key stakeholders from across neighbouring countries and beyond. In particular, among about **160 participants and guests** will be representatives from World Health Organization (WHO), USAID, and TB experts from the USA, France, Germany and other European countries, as well as Ukrainian non-governmental organisations. Delegations from nine countries will discuss best practices and actions to ensure that TB patients have access to the optimum treatments in the future.

This year’s symposium, **‘Overcoming challenges in TB care: From policy to practice’**, will focus on implementing the latest tools and tactics to fight TB. Current trends in TB care will be discussed and analysed, including the ‘patient-centered care’ approach, which involves supporting and empowering patients to make decisions about their own care.

While significant achievements have been attained in the region over the last decade, important challenges still remain. In particular, barriers to care exist with regards to patient to access the most innovative methods of care, the stigmatisation of patients with TB, and the treatment of comorbidities such as HIV and alcohol use disorder within health structures whereby illnesses are treated separately, rather than in an integrated way.

During the symposium, MSF will present encouraging preliminary results from operational research carried out in Zhytomyr, regarding an innovative shorter all-oral treatment regimen for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.

“We look forward to presenting the preliminary results of our research at the TB Symposium. The work being done in Zhytomyr in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine and the Yanovsky TB Institute is one example of how implementing the latest recommended treatments can give better outcomes, and give patients more hope”, says **Cristina Falconi,**

MSF Head of Mission in Ukraine. *“However, we know all too well that not enough progress has been made and many patients across the region do not have access to patient-centred models of care, which offer a dignified treatment and best opportunities to get cured. We hope the TB Symposium can play a part in putting this right.”*

The opening ceremony starts on March 5th at 9.00 am at the Hotel and Conference Venue: Radisson Blu Hotel, 22 Yaroslaviv Val Street, Kyiv.

Background:

- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an independent, international medical humanitarian organisation active in more than 70 countries worldwide. MSF was founded in 1971 by a small group of French doctors and journalists. It received the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its members' continued efforts to provide medical care in acute crises, as well as raising international awareness of potential humanitarian disasters.
- MSF first started working in Ukraine in 1999, and today MSF's work in the country centres around infectious diseases such as TB, HIV and hepatitis C, as well as provide relief to people affected by the conflict.
- Globally MSF has been involved in TB care for 30 years, often working alongside national health authorities to treat patients in a wide variety of settings, including chronic conflict zones, urban slums, prisons, refugee camps and rural areas. Now, MSF is one of the largest non-governmental providers of TB treatment worldwide.
- Ukraine has one of the highest rates of drug-resistant tuberculosis in the world and is number three in the world for absolute number of cases of extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis reported.
- Zhytomyr is one of the regions with the highest rate of tuberculosis cases in Ukraine. However, the number of drug-resistant TB patients who would had access to effective treatment was very limited, due to several factors, including inaccessibility of new TB drugs and the low level of patient support strategies in place. Furthermore, the rate of patients who didn't finish the treatment was high. That is why the Ministry of Health and MSF decided to launch a pilot project in Zhytomyr Oblast.
- By introducing a patient-centred treatment model, MSF will support the Ministry of Health of Ukraine in reducing deaths caused by drug-resistant tuberculosis in the region and prevent further spread of the disease.

For accreditation and more information:

Marta Znak, Field Communications Officer

P. +38-066-673-2710, +38-063-707-1646 | Email: MSF-UKR-Com-Officer@msf.org