Universal Health Organisation (UHO) Weekly Newsletter – 03 May 2024

The weekly newsletters bring the updates on the science, battered and bruised during the pandemic, legal updates and impact of activism for a just society, across the world. These are small steps to promote Transparency, Empowerment and Accountability – the ethos of the UHO.

Announcement: Membership & endorsements to the UHO invited: https://uho.org.in/member.php

AstraZeneca (marketed as Covishield in India), admits that the vaccine can cause serious side effects

In an UK court, AstraZeneca admitted that its vaccine, which is marketed as Covishield in India, can cause the rare and serious side effect, Thrombocytopenic Thrombosis Syndrome (TTS) which is manifested by blood clots with low platelet count. Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca was produced by the Serum Institute of India, Pune (SII) and widely administered in the country.

The news has been picked up by the mainstream British newspaper, The Telegraph. The daily reports that this admission can pave the way for multi-million pound legal pay outs. AstraZeneca is being sued in UK courts over claims that its vaccine developed with the University of Oxford, caused deaths and serious injuries in dozens of cases. The lawyers argued that the side effects from the vaccines had a devastating effect on many families.

Figures obtained by The Daily Telegraph under a freedom of information request show that out of 163 payouts made by the UK government, 158 (96.93), went to victims of AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine. This should be appraised in the context that AstraZeneca (Covishield) was not the main vaccine in the UK, with restriction of its use in people below 40 years due to serious adverse effects. In our country, on the other hand over 80% of our population received the Covishield vaccine down to 18 years of age.

We fear that without a proper adverse events following immunization (AEFI) system in our country to cope up with an unprecedented adult mass vaccination scale of the whole population, many cases of serious side effects following vaccination with Covishield might have gone unnoticed in our country.

In his testimony to the UK parliament Andrew Bridgen summarized the research on serious adverse events from the Covid vaccines as 1 in 800. He went on to emphasize that in the past vaccines have been withdrawn for far lower rates of adverse events. The swine flu vaccine was withdrawn in 1976 for an adverse events rate of Guillain-Barre Syndrome of 1 in 1,00,000 adults, while the rotavirus vaccine in children was withdrawn for causing intussusception (bowel obstruction) of 1 child out of 10,000 vaccine recipients. For our large country the rate serious adverse events of 1 in 800 recipients of the Covid vaccine should be a cause for great concern. If extrapolated to 100 crores vaccines, the serious side effects from the Covid vaccine can be conservatively estimated to be around 12,50,000

The prominent British cardiologist Dr Aseem Malhotra in his visit to India last year in February 2023 to attend the launch of the Universal Health Organization at New Delhi, was surprised to learn that the Covishield was being used in India. He gave a statement in the Economic Times and other mainstream newspapers, supported by Indian experts that the Covishield has more serious harms than

even the mRNA vaccines. He called for a full safety review about the side effects of this vaccine supporting his statement by the fact because of mishaps with this vaccine it was discontinued in early 2021 in a number of European countries.

Neglect of monitoring serious adverse effects from Covishield in spite of the WHO warning that such vaccines can cause TTS?

Notably a year ago, the WHO had warned that TTS emerged as an adverse event following immunization with the adenovirus vector vaccines like the Covishield. WHO had issued this emergency guidance as TTS is a serious and life threatening event and countries could monitor and create awareness among health care workers to deal with it.

Regrettably our authorities did not take this very seriously it appears, as evident from Gujarat Rajya Sabha MP Shaktisinh Gohil's statement on 01 May 2024 that the government ignored the WHO emergency guidelines to maintain a database of people who have been administered the Covid-19 vaccines. "Several questions are raised on how the government administered Covishield vaccines, despite the WHO alerting in 2023 regarding emergency guidelines to maintain a database of people being administered the Covid-19 vaccines, why did our country not act, whereas every country followed these guidelines." Gohil asked in a press conference.

Gohil also questioned why the manufacturing of vaccines why the task of manufacturing the vaccines were left to private players like SII and Bharat Biotech which manufactured Covaxin, instead of the Central Research Institute which was established in 1906. "When we have a pioneering institute in vaccine like this 118 year old Central Research Institute, whose work has been lauded by other countries, why private players were given the contract? The government gave Rs 3,000 crores advance to Serum Institute of India, and Rs 1,500 crores to Bharat Biotech," the Rajya Sabha member said.

PIL in Supreme Court to assess the risks associated with the Covishield vaccine's side effects

A public interest litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Supreme Court of India on 01 May 2024, urging the establishment of medical experts' panel under supervision of a retired Supreme Court Judge to assess the risks associated with the Covishield vaccine's side effects. Advocate Vishal Tiwari, who filed the PIL, also called for the Centre to implement a vaccine damage payment system for citizens who are severely disabled as a result of the vaccination drive during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Advocate Tiwari said that over 17.5 million doses of Covishield have been given in India. After the mass vaccination rollout there has been an increase in the cases of deaths due to heart attack and collapse of persons. There have been a number of cases of such events even in youngsters. After the document filed in the UK court by the manufacturer of Covishield, we are compelled to think upon the risks and hazardous consequences of Covishield vaccine which have been administered to the citizens on a large scale.

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Bharat Biotech in the chaos let loose by the AstraZeneca safety concerns claims that Covaxin is safer

Bharat Biotech, the manufacturer of the vaccine, Covaxin against Covid-19, claims that its vaccine is safer. This statement comes days after AstraZeneca (Covishield) admitted in the UK court that its vaccine could cause TTS or blood clots.

Bharat Biotech stated that its vaccine was manufactured with a single minded focus on safety first and does not cause blood clots or any other serious side-effects.

Without an independent AEFI system in our country we cannot be very confident about this vaccine either. It must be kept in mind that in our country less than 20% of the population took Covaxin.

It should be recalled that Covaxin came under a cloud during its Phase-3 trial. A 45 year old daily wage worker who participated in the trial at the People's Medical College, Bhopal, died in December 21, nine days after he took the first jab according to hospital records. The poor man's death was dismissed as coincidental. Without an independent safety monitory system we cannot be sure of the authenticity of this verdict. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a government organization had partnered with Bharat Biotech for production of this vaccine.

UHO feels that poor people who are vulnerable should not be part of such trials as they are likely to be exploited and any deaths tend to be brushed under the carpet. Similar mishaps had occurred during the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine trials among tribal girls in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh more than a decade ago. A number of girls died after taking the HPV jab. All efforts were made by the Gates Foundation, the sponsors of the trial, and the ICMR to brush the mishap under the carpet. But the public outcry forced an investigation. A joint parliamentary committee indicted the Gates Foundation and the ICMR for exploiting the vulnerable and poor tribal girls. Many irregularities were found in the conduct of the trials by the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Today, a decade later, we are in a more pathetic situation. Instead of any serious action against the Gates Foundation and the ICMR, both continue to dictate our health research in spite of various conflicts of interests due to strong links with pharmaceutical companies. To add insult to injury, the Gates Foundation has signed a declaration of intent with the ICMR for collaboration in research. And with the Public Health Foundation in India (PHFI), with its strong ties with the Gates Foundation, our health policies are being decided under various conflicts of interest. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the members of PHFI played a major role in calling the shots.

To sum up we have surrendered both health research and health policy to the Gates Foundation.