

Universal Health Organisation (UHO)

Weekly Newsletter – 12 Jul 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>

Dubious trials by pharma giant has the potential to mar India's reputation

The rising cases of [dubious drug trials](#) in India not only puts people's lives at risk not only in India but across the globe as India aspires to be the pharmacy of the world, but can also affect the country's reputation leading to a loss of public trust. The Global pharma giant Roche has appealed to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), to investigate the critical gaps in trials conducted by Indian Pharma Cadila Healthcare Limited (Zydus-Cadila), to develop a biosimilar for treatment of breast cancer.

Concerns about this trial were being raised for quite some time. Roche has alleged that Zydus has procured Perjeta, the original drug manufactured by Roche from questionable sources which raises quality and patient safety issues.

The trial was conducted in 40 centres including prestigious institutions like the AIIMS, New Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Centre, Tata Memorial Hospital Mumbai, among others. The allegation is that the trials started before Zydus had procured the comparator drug Perjeta from the original manufacturer Roche. According to their records Zydus procured 480 vials of the drug in January 2023, months after the trials started in September 2022.

Zydus seems to be a habitual offender. An earlier trial conducted by Zydus for its biosimilar Ujvira also followed a similar pattern of getting the biologic reference drug from dubious sources instead of the authentic manufacturer.

UHO expresses concerns that such malpractices which come to notice may be just the tip of the iceberg. From informal sources it has learned that such serious deviations are going on in other institutions in the country. The Drug Controller General of India should investigate the matter and the errant pharma company should be punished.

At stake are human lives, and the reputation of the country as the pharmacy of the world.

India signs USD 170 million policy-based loan to strengthen pandemic preparedness

India has signed a [\\$170 million loan policy for pandemic preparedness](#) with the Asia Development Bank (ADB). This seems like a prepaid scheme to splurge resources in the next pandemic which is assumed to come sooner or later and with a far high magnitude than the Covid-19 pandemic.

Without a proper definition of a pandemic, one can have reservations on whether the Covid-19 was a pandemic in the true sense. While there is no clear cut definition of a pandemic, common sense understanding of a pandemic is when it kills young and healthy persons in large numbers besides the old and the infirm. Covid-19 certainly did not impact the young and the healthy.

Nevertheless, the combined hype by media, career scientists, compromised academics, opportunistic politicians and bureaucrats elevated it to the status of "pandemic of the century" with enough force to

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Mr. Prakash Pohare, Dr Veena Raghava (Treasurer), Prof Bhaskaran Raman (Secretary), Dr. Praveen K Saxena,
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subdue the world citizens by “shock and awe.” Science, common sense and logic were thrown out of the window. Even hard data showing minimum morbidity and mortality of the novel virus vis-à-vis other serious public health problems were ignored by the policy makers and public alike.

Against this background, UHO has serious apprehensions that given this prepaid bounty of a loan there would be an urgency to declare another pandemic as the same stakeholders with their own conflicts of interests stand to benefit from “pandemics.” Any wonder that the next pandemic is already being hyped as more deadly even without knowing the pathogen.

Let there be debate around the uncertainties surrounding the preventive HPV vaccine

The push for the HPV vaccine as a prevention for cervical cancer is on. With celebrity and a Rajya Sabha Member like [Sudha Murthy vouching for it](#) the push is poised to become a shove anytime. Regrettably, all the celebrities, doctors, policy makers and others seem to have an aversion for hard data showing a sharp [decline in cervical cancer rates](#) before introduction of the vaccine. They also shy away from studies which indicate that the evidence of the HPV vaccine for preventing cervical cancer is weak.

Amidst this mindless promotion of the HPV vaccine there is a voice of reason. In a column titled, ["Indigenous HPV Vaccine, The Rhetoric and The Reality,"](#) in the leading English daily The Hindu, the authors have dwelled on the uncertainties surrounding the HPV vaccine.

UHO hopes that such critical and balanced views triggers an extensive debate and deliberation before the HPV vaccine is promoted on a mass scale. UHO also has strong reservations about it being introduced in the governments immunization program using taxpayers money as the evidence of its efficacy is not foolproof.

WHO goes one step further and praises the development of therapeutic vaccines against cervical cancer

Ignorance among celebrities promoting HPV vaccine about data and sharply falling trends of cervical cancer is understandable. What is unacceptable is the WHO turning a Nelson’s eye to the falling trends of cervical cancer and [patronizingly promoting development of therapeutic vaccines](#) against cervical cancer in developing countries.

UHO is not averse to robust vaccine research but is always concerned about products pushed in unholy haste under cover of propaganda and rhetoric instead of hard science exploring all issues of safety and efficacy which under normal circumstances takes decades.

Australian Judge who blocked lawsuits against Covid-19 vaccines had undisclosed conflicts of interests

It has come to light down under that an Australian judge who blocked lawsuits related to Covid-19 vaccines had undisclosed conflicts of interest. The concerned judge, Justice Helen Rofe served formerly as [counsel to Pfizer’s legal team](#) which she did not disclose. According to procedure she should have recused from hearings concerning products manufactured by Pfizer. Failing to do so is breach of professional ethics on her part. This has raised calls for a parliamentary inquiry against her.

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Even the staid British Medical Journal (BMJ) raises alarm over a Covid-19 summer wave

The BMJ a comparatively objective and balanced medical journal [has raised an alarm](#) over a summer wave of Covid-19 sweeping the UK and parts of Europe. The UHO notes the following gaps in the reasoning put forth in the editorial.

No age profile of persons dying is given, even when influenza or pneumonia is causing more than 10 times of the deaths, Covid is given extra importance, calling it a wave. No comparison with usual mortality from influenza like illness (ILI) during these seasons.

Also, "to promote cleaner indoor air and the potential use of facemasks in healthcare settings and on public transport during future waves. The editorial also called for wastewater monitoring to restart." Meanwhile, latest data from the Office for National Statistics show that in the week ending 21 June there were 153 deaths involving covid-19. This equates to 1.5% of all deaths registered in England and Wales that week. This is similar to the week before, when 152 deaths reported (1.4%) [involved covid-19](#). In comparison, in both these weeks there were far more deaths involving influenza or pneumonia ([1803 in total](#)).

Tobacco industry continues to sponsor continuing medical education (CME) of doctors

UHO notes with concern that the strong tobacco lobby continues to sponsor CMEs. the for-profit medical media company [Medscape promoted](#) a series of continuing medical education (CME) courses funded by a grant from tobacco company Philip Morris International (PMI). These activities were certified by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) along with other health care professional education organizations (American Nurses Credentialing Center, Interprofessional Continuing Education, Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, American Board of Internal Medicine). As cigarette sales decline, PMI is promoting "harm reduction" nicotine products. This superficially appealing slogan thinly disguises PMI's campaign to promote company brands designed to sustain nicotine addiction among people who smoke and entice youth who do not smoke to adopt new nicotine products. PMI's version of harm reduction is communicated through multiple channels, including its active social media and web presence, "advertorials" in major newspapers, and its wholly funded foundation.

The tobacco industry has a long history of undermining science to promote its products, the leading cause of preventable disease and premature death in the US, indicating inherently unresolvable conflicts incompatible with education of clinicians or sponsorship of certified CME. PMI's hypocrisy in promoting a harm reduction agenda is highlighted by its aggressive marketing of Marlboro, the world's leading cigarette brand, including campaigns manifestly targeting youth.

UHO recommends that all CME should be partly sponsored by the government, with contribution from participants, and by only reputed academicians from Medical Colleges should be invited as resource persons.

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