

Secretary Health, Sindh and DG, PSQCA assure “Restriction for Mercury Content in “Mercury Added Consumer Products” (MDAs & SWCs) in Sindh, Pakistan

In continuation of SDPI policy intervention efforts and activities, on “Chemicals/Mercury in Consumer Products,” three meetings were held with relevant provincial government health officials and academia in Karachi, 14-15 March, 2019.

Meeting with Secretary Health, Sindh was held at Sindh Secretariat, Karachi. Officer on Special Duty Health (for Dr. Aejjaz), Deputy Secretary Health (Sindh) and Ms. Ainy Zehra, SDPI Mercury research team focal person in Sindh were also present.

30 minute discussion were held with the Secretary health and his team on one point agenda Over item – “Ban, restrict and discourage mercury dental amalgam (MDAs) use for children in Sindh Province.”

Dr. Mahmood SDPI, Islamabad started the meeting by introducing SDPI and its objectives/activities and drew attention towards minimizing the harmful effects of mercury dental amalgam and safeguarding children’s health in Sindh. He also referred to Minamata convention on Mercury, mercury exposure and its health impacts on human health, especially children and mentioned issuance of advisory notes by health department of KPK, Baluchistan and PDA, the Pakistan Dental Association. (SDPI research publications were shared with the Secretary & his officials). He emphasized to ban or restrict and discourage the use of mercury dental amalgam for children in Sindh province and subsequently, issuance of advisory note to the relevant departments, dentistry collages, hospitals/clinics, PMDC, Sindh & PDA. The secretary Health, Sindh, appreciated SDPI team and showed serious concern to safeguarding children’s health in Sindh. He suggested to get comments from relevant provincial health stakeholders/provincial departments, to ban or restrict and discourage the use of mercury dental amalgam for children (below the age of 15 years) in Sindh. After collecting the positive comments from concern quarters, he assured for an advisory note to the relevant health departments, dentistry collages, hospitals/clinics, PMDC, PDA in Sindh. The decisions taken were (i) to get comments/views/inputs from relevant health departments/stakeholders regarding, ban or restrict and discourage the use of mercury dental amalgam for children (below the age of 15 years) in Sindh (ii) issuance of advisory Note on the above to the dentistry collages, hospitals/clinics, PMDC, PDA in Sindh and (iii) promotion of mercury free alternate materials for dental health care.

The 2nd meeting with Director General (DG), Pakistan Standards & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) was held at PSQCA Head Office, Karachi. Secretary, PSQCA, Director Standardization, PQSCA, Assistant Director (Chemicals), PSQCA and Ms. Ainy Zehra were also present. The issue under discussion was the “ Skin Whitening Creams (SWCs) Use in Pakistan.”

Dr. Mahmood, briefed the meeting participants about SDPI, its mandate and its proactive role, to highlight the hazardous effects of chemicals exposure, especially of mercury in skin whitening creams used across the country. SDPI research publications on SWCs studies were shared with DG, PQSCA which were received with appreciation and thanks. He informed the participants of SDPI support and projection of PSQCA notifications, followed by strict actions and closure of those units with hazardous SWCs with mercury content above the permissible limits (PL). He strongly recommended PL for Mercury one part per million (1 ppm), as required by Minama Convention on mercury and not 3 ppm. Director General, PSQCA explained about the open market surveillance conducted by PSQCA in Lahore and Karachi. He also admired the role of SDPI and its continued concerns & efforts towards safeguarding public health, especially of children and support to PSQCA in this regard. Furthermore, He extended his views to promote evidence based research and nominated Ms. Ainy Zehra, a focal person from PSQCA for providing any assistance from PSQCA. The decisions taken were (i) to enhance mutual cooperation regarding SWCs use issue in the country, (ii) to organize seminars in cooperation with stakeholders for public awareness and (iii) to work and expedite development of “Standards” for “Chemicals in products”, including Mercury content in SWCs. SDPI was invited to the membership of the PSQCA Standards Development Committee – the first civil society organization representative on the SD committee.

The 3rd meeting with Dean, Faculty of Dentistry, Sindh Institute of Oral Health Sciences, was held at Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi. Exhaustive discussion (over two hours) took place on “Mercury dental amalgam use for children in the country” which was also participated by his senior faculty member. We agreed to (i) jointly organize a either of, a regional, national or Sindh Provincial (as possible) conference in Karachi or Islamabad, to sensitize “Policy Makers” and stakeholders awareness on the issue and (ii) development of a joint proposal on mercury dental amalgam related issues, including development of a portable mobile equipment for mercury recycling from mercury dental waste, to reduce mercury use in dentistry and its import. SDPI & FoD research publications were also exchanged.

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