Towards achievement of the 2020 goal of sound chemicals management

Intervention by Peter Orris, MD, MPH,
World Federation of Public Health Associations
SAICM Bureau Health Sector Member

Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity. I would like to thank the secretariat as well for its hard work in preparation of this meeting and the government of Switzerland for hosting. My name is Peter Orris, and I have had the privilege of serving on the SAICM Bureau over the past several years as the Health Sector Representative.

For the last 13 years, since the Johannesburg Declaration, through a series of meetings, agreements, joint projects, efforts by international agencies, governments, health care providers, and NGOs progress has been made. Clearly though we are far from the 2020 goals and, despite continuing progress within our sector, 5 years will not be enough time to fully realize this goal.
Thanks to the recent WHO survey of member countries, universities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations, we have data on the priorities of these health sector institutions from 51 countries. The governments almost universally prioritized the development of better ways to determine impacts of chemicals on health in order to set priorities for action and to monitor progress of the Strategic Approach as well as formulating strategies aimed at prevention of ill-health and disease caused by chemicals in communities and amongst workers. In addition they identified building capabilities of countries to deal with poisonings and chemical incidents as important.

All responders emphasized the importance of formulating strategies directed specifically at the health of children. The non-governmental participants included actions to improve access to scientific knowledge and promoting alternatives to highly toxic and persistent chemicals as high
priorities. All respondents as well prioritized raising awareness and professional training around this issue within the health sector.

Through the actions of WHO, the SAICM secretariat, and advocacy groups, and an increasing number of professional and institutional organizations, the environment is now on the agenda of health care institutions throughout the Globe. Issues such as safer substitution of harmful chemicals when available and protection for health care workers when not, are the basis of management meetings at many provider organizations. Waste reduction, recycling, and environmentally safe treatment and disposal have entered the equation for these facilities as has increasing attention to building design and operation to promote energy efficiency sustainable energy generation. But while increasingly accepted as operating imperatives for health care providers, large and small, practical implementation of these goals is still frequently elusive.
The answers to this WHO survey and only partial implementation of sustainable practices with respect to chemicals by health care providers emphasize the unfinished agenda of SAICM in the Health Sector. The Health Sector Strategy for the Implementation of SAICM proposed by the health sector stakeholders meeting in Slovenia in 2010, is therefore important for inclusion by way of a specific mention made in the resolution based on the OOG such as that proposed by WHO.

Finally, the health sector and its research organizations have devoted increasing attention toward the health impacts of the chemicals identified as Emerging Policy Issues, Highly Hazardous Pesticides, EDCs, and the others being discussed at this meeting. The attention brought to the gaps in our knowledge by SAICM are important both for the prioritization of these issues for research funding and action. Yet another importance of the next 5 years of SAICM and its continuance into the future.

Thank you