PRESS RELEASE

Fight Against Epilepsy

A 4-Year pilot initiative to bring epilepsy out of the shadows in Ghana

Accra, Ghana - 22 October 2012 - The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organization seeks to address the treatment gap in the management of epilepsy in the country through the initiative “Fight Against Epilepsy”. Supported by the Sanofi Espoir foundation for a 4-year period, in partnership with the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) and the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE), this pilot project has just been officially launched in the Tolon-Kumbungu District, in the Northern Region. To compare the impact of this initiative on this rural area where there are about seven hundred (700) people affected with epilepsy, the semi-urban region of Ashiedu Keteke Submetro, in the Greater Accra Region, has also been chosen. After the pilot phase, Ghana will take the whole ownership the project and scale it up to all ten regions of the country through the snowball effect.

Epilepsy is not madness, it is not spirit-possession and it is not a curse. Most cases are not inherited so people with epilepsy rarely have children with epilepsy. Epilepsy is a condition of recurrent and unprovoked fits. It is a treatable disorder of the brain which is a common problem affecting about 50 million people in the world, 85% of whom live in resource-poor countries. WHO estimates that epilepsy on the African continent affects up to 10 million people of all ages but especially within childhood, adolescence and the ageing population.

One in ten adults will have a seizure or fit sometime during their life. Epilepsy could be life threatening as prolonged or repeated seizures can result in death if not managed immediately. 80% of people who live with epilepsy in Africa do not receive treatment due to poor integration
into primary health care system, poor supply and distribution of anti-epileptic medicines, poor health information systems, weak community-based interventions or support, beliefs, attitudes, stigma and human rights abuse. Many people with epilepsy never see a doctor but end up at the faith-based homes or traditionalists. Even within the public health system, Community Psychiatric Nurses (CPN) give most of the care. Treatment for epilepsy is simple, inexpensive and effective. 70% of patients can be free of fits and live normally after two years of treatment with antiepileptic medicines.

Epilepsy exerts a lot of psychosocial impact on those suffering from it and their family members. It leads to social isolation and poor social adaptation. Epilepsy is not only a medical condition, but also a social and public health issue which requires multi-disciplinary approach to its management.

The goal of the Fight Against Epilepsy initiative, deployed as a pilot phase in Ghana and in Vietnam, is to improve access to care and services for people with epilepsy, raise awareness on epilepsy, place it as a priority in the national health agenda and involve non-specialist providers in epilepsy care. The initiative aims at integrating epilepsy management in primary health care system, improve awareness of community groups to decrease stigma and increase demand for epilepsy care. The quality of life of patients and families will be improved. This will enable children with epilepsy go back to school and adults to be employed for a more inclusive society.

**Key messages:** Epilepsy is not contagious. Epilepsy is treatable. People with epilepsy can live a normal life.

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