The Novartis Malaria Initiative
Access – improving affordability and availability of medicines

Over the past decade, the Novartis Malaria Initiative has pioneered the pharmaceutical response to the fight against malaria by spearheading what has become one of the industry’s largest access-to-medicine programs today.

Pioneering the not-for-profit supply of treatments
Through a partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2001, Novartis was the first company in the pharmaceutical industry to commit to the not-for-profit supply of antimalarial treatments to the public sector of endemic countries.

- Since 2001, we have provided more than 400 million treatments of our artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), Coartem® for adults and Coartem® Dispersible for children, without profit to malaria-endemic countries, saving an estimated 1 million lives.¹
- Treatments are brought to malaria-endemic countries through grants from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNDP, UNICEF, UNITAID, the President’s Malaria Initiative in the US, the World Bank, Missionpharma, Doctors without Borders, and many other development organizations. It is estimated that five out of ten patients who have access to an ACT in the public sector are being treated with Coartem® or Coartem® Dispersible.

We have completed one of the largest and fastest scale-ups in the industry: from four million treatments in 2004 to over 82 million treatments delivered in 2010; and from 12 countries served to more than 60 today. In the same timeframe, thanks to economies of scale in sourcing and manufacturing, significant cost reductions could be achieved that allowed to reduce the price for public-sector buyers by more than half.

In order to ensure patient access in countries where the need is greatest and resources are most limited, Novartis has adopted a differential pricing strategy.* We are also exploring differential pricing structures through novel channels to improve access. It is estimated that up to half of malaria patients in Africa do not have access to public health services and buy antimalarial treatments at local market stalls and drug shops where they often purchase sub-standard or counterfeit medicines because they are cheaper. Novartis is working with the Affordable Medicines Facility – malaria (AMFm), an international partnership to expand access to subsidized ACTs, to bridge this gap. Within the AMFm framework, we began shipments of Coartem® and Coartem® Dispersible to Nigeria in 2010, followed by deliveries to other countries in 2011.

Finding innovative solutions to expand access
Our expertise and innovation extends beyond research and development, and we are pioneering the use of mobile phone technology to help expand access to medicines in the most remote areas of the world.

- Prompt access to effective treatments is vital for the successful management of malaria; however, drug stock-outs continue to be a

* Coartem® is available at not-for-profit prices for public sector use in developing countries, and under the brand name of Riamet® in Europe.
problem for many healthcare facilities. In 2009-2010, Novartis led “SMS for Life” with the support of the Roll Back Malaria partnership, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Tanzania, Vodafone and IBM, to expand access to essential anti-malarial medicines. The goal was to eliminate stock-outs in public health facilities, increase access in rural areas, and reduce the number of deaths from malaria. The project used a combination of mobile phones, SMS messages and electronic mapping technology to track weekly stock levels of key antimalarials. The 21-week pilot in three rural districts of Tanzania covering 129 health facilities led to a dramatic reduction in stock outs: at the start of the pilot, 26% of all health facilities had no ACTs of any dose type, but by the end of the pilot, this stock-out rate had been reduced to just 0.8%. “SMS for Life” is now being rolled out across Tanzania and expanded to other African countries including Ghana and Kenya, where multi-district pilots have been set up.

We also encourage our own associates to support access to medicines. This year, as part of our bi-annual global employee survey completed by associates from the Pharmaceuticals division, we made a donation to support the implementation of “SMS for Life” in five districts of Kenya. This came as a direct response to feedback we had received during our last survey in which employees had indicated the importance of corporate social responsibility to them.

Looking forward: improving access to reach elimination

Spearheading programs to expand access to life-saving medicines is one stepping stone toward malaria elimination. Looking forward, action is required on several interconnected fronts.

Quality: high-quality antimalarials are crucial to avoid the development of parasite resistance. Coartem® is the first fixed-dose ACT using lumefantrine as the partner compound. An advantage of this combination is that lumefantrine is not available as a mono-therapy, and it has never been used by itself for the treatment of malaria. Therefore, the potential risk of resistance building may be much lower than with other agents.

Eliminating monotherapies and substandard antimalarials is essential.

Affordability and Accessibility: effective treatments need to be made affordable to patients in all market segments including in the non-premium private market. Initiatives such as the AMFm can help bridge the gap. We also need to increase coverage by preventing stock-outs of antimalarial treatments and rapid diagnostic tests, and by implementing other capacity-building measures that contribute to improving access.

Patient compliance: continued information is necessary to ensure treatment compliance, hence successful health outcomes. Further, formulations tailored to the needs of patients, such as a pediatric formulation, user-friendly packaging and patient education can enhance treatment adherence.

Improved parasite targeting: we are evaluating the feasibility of reducing malaria transmission through the mass screening and targeted treatment of asymptomatic patients carrying parasites.

Parasite resistance: ongoing research and development is needed beyond artemisinin derivatives – in case resistance would develop to these compounds. Research into the next generation of antimalarials is thus paramount to malaria elimination.

“The Division of Malaria Control is both proud and excited about the “SMS for Life” pilot in Kenya. We are committed to ensuring universal access to prompt and effective antimalarial treatment but our health facilities suffer constant medicine stock-outs of between 4 to 20%. We hope “SMS for Life” will help us remedy this situation – and we keep a box of Coartem® Dispersible in our office as a token of our faith in the future.”

Dr. Elizabeth Juma, Head, Division of Malaria Control, Ministry of Health, Kenya
Recognizing our contribution to global health

In recognition of its contribution to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Novartis Malaria Initiative was honored with the 2010 World Business and Development Award by the United Nations Development Program, the International Chamber of Commerce and the International Business Leaders Forum. The MDGs are eight time-bound goals of concrete benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty.

Through its integrated program including access to medicines, research, and training programs, the Novartis Malaria Initiative was commended for its contribution to the health-related MDGs of reducing child mortality (MDG #4), improving maternal health (MDG #5), and combating neglected diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, dengue fever, salmonella and leprosy (MDG #6).

The Novartis Malaria Initiative

For over a decade, the Novartis Malaria Initiative has been a pioneer in the fight against malaria. Focused on access, treatment, R&D and capacity-building, the initiative is the largest access-to-medicine program of Novartis measured by the number of patients reached annually. Together with our partners, and with our continued patient-centric approach, we are committed to the common goal of malaria elimination.

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References

1 Data on file at Novartis Malaria Initiative. Most recently published statistic on this can be found in the Novartis Annual Report 2009. 2010. “Estimated lives saved” is an estimate based on the ratio between annual malaria cases and deaths published in the WHO World Malaria Report, a distribution analysis of the cumulatively supplied Coartem® treatments over time and the efficacy rate of Coartem® as per published clinical trial data.


6 ClinicalTrials.gov identifier: NCT01256658.


Photo credit: Mothers with their children at the Ifakara Health Centre in the Bagamoyo district of Tanzania, Novartis

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