

Future of SAICM  
Beyond 2020  
Susan Wilburn, Health Care Without Harm

Thank you Madame co-chair and congratulations to you and your co-chair for your election and thank you for your leadership and your role, Leticia, in the organization of the very important high level panel earlier today.

My name is Susan Wilburn, I am the Sustainability Director for Health Care Without Harm's network of Global Green and Healthy Hospitals and the Representative to the Bureau of ICCM5 for health sector civil society

We continue to echo what has been repeated about the critical nature of the SAICM multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach.

One of the successes of SAICM has been the development of the health sector strategy.

The SAICM health sector strategy set the stage for greater involvement of the sector in SAICM.

It was foresightful in identifying the important role of health professionals who care for the public's health to identify, assess and address health impacts from chemical exposures.

2 components of the strategy have been key:

1. Building capacity as above – which is important for care: both treatment and prevention as well as in policy development and the capacity of health leaders to participate in intersectoral discussions to develop chemical and waste policies to protect public health and the environment
2. The second is for the sector to address chemical hazards in our own practice.

To First do not harm – according to the Hippocratic Oath. So that the chemicals we use and how the waste is treated and managed in health care settings does not cause harm.

We need to lead by example to select and use products that are less toxic.

By understanding the nature of the products that we use in daily care of patients that may cause harm such as mercury – that many nurses hold in their hands every day, learning about toxicity and pathophysiology of health impacts, health professionals can apply that learning to industrial and consumer products to identify public health hazards and work for the prevention of negative health outcomes.

The Quick Start Programme was very important to assist in the implementation of the health sector strategy. We were involved in 2 QSP projects implemented in Argentina and the Philippines raising awareness, educating about hazards and substituting hazardous chemicals in hospitals. This was tremendously successful and demonstrated the need to scale-up across the country but was limited by the availability of funds.

We welcome the addition of financing to the agenda as we will not achieve successful management and engagement of health professionals without a budget to accomplish the goals

The role of Bureau health sector civil society representative is to increase engagement of and contribution from the health sector in chemical safety and in SAICM.

We took the opportunity during the development of the WHO Chemicals Roadmap and the preparation for this intersessional process to engage more health actors who had not previously been involved in chemicals management. One of the new organizations to become involved – in addition to the World Federation of Public Health Associations and World Medical Association is the NCD Alliance (non-communicable disease). The WHO Global Burden of Disease from air pollution showed 7 million excess deaths from air pollution – mostly from cardio-pulmonary disease and strokes. This data brought those working on NCDs into the discussion on chemicals. Air pollution is made up of chemicals – some of which are contaminants from the management of health care waste and powering health facilities.

I look forward to Thursday's lunch event organized by WHO to hear from all of you about how you think best to engage more health actors in the sound management of chemicals and waste.

The future role of the health sector in chemicals management is to protect public health, eliminating hazards and preventing exposure to hazards.

We heard from the Zambia Ministry of Health representative in today's informal dialogue about the gap in developing countries about the presence of poison-control centers and applaud their work to develop a poison control center and hopefully network across Africa.

However, we would like to see a poison-free future – and see the end of the need for poison-control centers.

For this to happen, the capacity of poison- control centers should be developed to move from being reactive to treat poisoning – a necessary component of the safe management of chemicals that of managing poisoning, but more important to use that experience to prevent future poisoning.

To this end we need to apply what is called in occupational health scientific circles, the hierarchy of controls and move up the hierarchy to eliminate hazards, substitute for less hazardous substances before managing the hazards and using personal protective equipment to control exposure.

This is especially where we can eliminate unnecessary chemical hazards, for example the unnecessary contamination of soap used in homes and in hospitals with Triclosan, an endocrine disruptor, when handwashing with soap and water alone is effective. The use of Triclosan contaminated soaps is a very common in this region of Latin America.

Less toxic alternatives to products in use need to be identified and where they do not exist designed through green and sustainable chemistry. The identification of the chemicals occurring in health products is a necessary first step which emphasizes transparency in supply chains.

Many good examples exist and many more are needed. One good examples is the Austrian safer disinfectants data base, WIDES.

Taking heed of the discussion about plastics in the ocean in the keynote speech today and the high level panel, we also need to phase out the use of unsustainable plastics in the health sector – currently IV tubing is made with PVC plastic softened with DEHP, a reproductive hazard. Appropriate alternatives exist.

Finally, as you can see, the future sound management of chemicals requires an integrative approach – the opportunity provided by the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Countries who are successfully managing chemicals will be able to report their successes not only for target 12.4 sustainable production and consumption but also in all 17 goals as discussed by our keynote speaker this morning including but not limited to health, women, workers, human rights, poverty elimination, food security, and sustainable energy.

SAICM Beyond2020 is an important success story to be reported in the context of SDG 17 on Partnership for the goals.

Thank you very much Madame co-chair.