

Summary: Preparation Meeting for the Operational Excellence Working Group

25 August 2018

Passage Hotel, Basel, Switzerland

Overview

The Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy (GPZL) was established in 2018 to catalyze and coordinate action toward the goal of zero leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease. The partnership's Research Agenda Working Group is concerned with developing a comprehensive agenda for research needed to achieve zero leprosy. The second group, on Operational Excellence, will identify and promote best practices to achieve zero leprosy and help facilitate the uptake of research and new interventions into national leprosy elimination programmes. Beginning in late 2018, a third working group, on Resource Mobilization and Advocacy, will take these initiatives forward to potential donors and partners.

This meeting is a preparation meeting to discuss the work, structure and application of the Operational Excellence Working Group.

Meeting participants

1. Bart Vander Plaetse (Chair, Operational Excellence Working Group)
2. Christine Fenenga (Coordinator, Operational Excellence Working Group)
3. David Addiss (Secretariat Advisor, GPZL)
4. Jan van Berkel (President, ILEP)
5. Arielle Cavaliero (Novartis Foundation)
6. Courtenay Dusenbury (Secretariat Director, GPZL)
7. Geoff Warne (CEO, ILEP)

Objectives of the meeting

Presented by Bart Vander Plaetse, Chair:

1. Review current (potential) good practice themes in order to fine-tune current Term of References for the Operational Excellence Working Group while considering available resources and implementation time.
2. Initiate an inclusive process that will lead to a comprehensive agenda for Operational Excellence Working Group, facilitate national leprosy programmes to work towards Zero Leprosy and that can be used to advocate for additional funding.
3. Define the steps to establish Operational Excellence Working Group and sub-groups.
4. Plan for a transparent communication structure between the Operational Excellence Working Group and other working groups, leadership team, national leprosy programmes, World Health Organization and other neglected tropical disease (NTD) programmes.

Relevant outcomes of the Research Agenda Working Group

David Addiss shared a short overview of the outcomes of the Research Agenda Working Group meeting that took place the two days prior to the Operational Excellence Working Group meeting.

An important result of the Research Agenda Working Group were the themes suggested by Cairns Smith that will guide and unify the research sub-groups:

1. How can people at risk of leprosy be identified? (mapping, screening tests, case-finding)
2. How can leprosy be prevented in those at increased risk? (post-exposure prophylaxis, vaccines, prompt treatment of index cases)
3. How can early detection of infections be sustained? (operational research, capacity-building, reducing stigma)
4. How can leprosy-related stigma and disability be most effectively reduced?

Another important factor for both working groups is their distinction: whenever there is a clear research question, the task is for the Research Working Group. In the case of an operational question, the Operational Excellence Working Group will work on it. The group noted a close link between the Research Agenda Working Group and Operational Excellence Working Group, in particular where it concerns the operational research, which is part of the Research Agenda Working Group.

The context of the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy (GPZL)

The GPZL is a breakthrough because it has brought everyone at the table: ILEP members, Novartis Foundation, national programme managers and WHO. There is a belief among key stakeholders this initiative of Zero Leprosy may create 'fire' internationally, like there was in the days of early multi-drug therapy.

Although ILEP members may have different priorities and varying levels of capacity, the GPZL creates a momentum to work jointly on a common goal and use components of operational excellence. Proof of concept and additional funding can help to drive the collaboration.

The GPZL offers also opportunities to learn. For example, one of the lessons generated through the LPEP program is that although NGOs and funders knew what was happening, national leprosy programs were not involved till late. One important task of WG 2 will be to engage national program managers and create ownership. This, and jointly assess the priorities and capacity needs of the country program will help bringing components of operational excellence at scale. Local training institutions and public health institutes responsible for building capacity in countries can play an important role in developing local capacity. We can also learn from other successful partnerships such as the NTD trachoma that succeeded through strong NGO presence and bringing on board Ministries of Health to actually implement.

Whereas the Operational Excellence Working Group needs to retain a wide view, it is important to prioritize and realize "quick wins." This first year's focus will be on the transmission pillar. Meanwhile, it is well noted that organizations of persons affected have joined the partnership because addressing issues of disability and exclusion are part of its mandate.

Courtenay Dusenbury explained the “Long-Term Milestones” Road Map, a living document reflecting the milestones of both working groups. For the Operational Excellence Working Group, a core milestone is that countries have measurably improved national capacity in order to realize Zero Leprosy, which is the core of effectiveness of the partnership. Under the road map, in 2018 the Operational Excellence Working Group will develop a Zero Leprosy Toolbox (see further elaboration below).

The assignment of the Operational Excellence Working Group

Coordinator Christine Fenenga provided a short overview of the objectives of the Operational Excellence Working Group, which are “to foster the promotion, development, use, scale-up, monitoring, and evaluation of best practices and promising innovations in national leprosy control programmes to move them forward along a continuum to zero leprosy.” Besides a detailed road map or timeline with deliverables, another important deliverable of the Operational Excellence Working Group will be a field-tested toolbox of best practices. The Operational Excellence Working Group will also consider barriers to adopt these practices and promote the implementation of them. Results can be used for advocacy and fundraising.

Details of the Zero Leprosy Toolbox

The Zero Leprosy toolbox includes an assessment tool of country capacity, a visioning template to help plan out strategies (country specifically) for getting to zero leprosy. The assessment will provide information on determinants, contexts, enablers, hindrances for success (e.g., countries are on spectrum from zero/low to high capacity, high/low endemicity). The toolbox will also include a menu of best practices in various technical areas to support countries in thinking through options for zero leprosy. It should also have material appropriate to each level of organization. The toolbox will be guided by the WHO guidelines released in August 2018 and existing national country leprosy plans. It will not create new plans but rather will help countries to expand upon current approaches and to try new ones. The Zero Leprosy toolbox’s assessment and visioning will be tested in three countries in the first half of 2019. The GPZL’s third working group will focus on resource-mobilization for countries to implement the strategies selected to move toward Zero Leprosy.

During the discussion, suggestions were also made to organize an international help desk or knowledge center for countries to discuss issues and approaches and find solutions.

The toolbox structure will be aligned around five key themes. Sub-groups of the Operational Excellence Working Group will be organized the same way:

- How can people at risk of leprosy be identified?
- How can leprosy be prevented in the population at increased risk?
- How can early detection of leprosy infections be sustained?
- How can disability effectively be prevented after completion of treatment?
- How can stigma and discrimination effectively be reduced?

A set of key success factors underlies these as a matrix (leadership, human relation, policy, monitoring and evaluation, policy framework, finance, gender awareness, stigma awareness, etc). Assuring alignment with the WHO Guidelines will be important to obtain the support of the National Programme Managers.

Budget

Funding allocated for the Operational Excellence Working Group includes salary and travel costs for the coordinator and \$45,000 for meetings and/or other operations. Funds may be limited for translation. At this time, ILEP is the primary funding source.

Next steps

The concept plan will be presented to the leadership team of the GPZL, after which the concept will be discussed in more detail with the three National Programme Managers of the leadership team. It will be key to the success of this working group that National Programme Managers adopt and support the Operational Excellence Working Group plans and demonstrate commitment to make it a success. After receiving input of the three managers, we can start selecting members. They will include other National Programme Managers, technical experts with multi-country scope (advisors), and persons affected by leprosy. Members will be nominated by the Secretariat and approved by the Leadership Team by mid-September. During a meeting in early October (11-12) the Operational Excellence Working Group members will be asked to validate and approve the Operational Excellence Working Group agenda and design and determine what additional expertise is needed to inform the development of the assessment tool, “visioning” template, and menu of best practices. This will be followed by an open call for persons to be involved in the working group.