

Pakistan launches its first Hepatitis Strategic Framework

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Recently National Hepatitis Strategic Framework (NHSF) 2017-2021 was launched in Islamabad, with the basic aim to reduce Hepatitis B and C chronic cases by 10 per cent, and new cases by 30 per cent. This step was primarily taken due to existence of a weak epidemiological data. The target is the first milestone to be achieved by 2021 as part of the larger vision to eliminate viral hepatitis as a major public health threat by 2030.

The Pakistan Health Research Council (PHRC), the Ministry of Health, and the World Health Organization (WHO) in the presence of the Director General of WHO Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Regional Head of WHO Dr. Mahmoud Fikri, and the minister and secretary of health Saira Afzal and Muhammad Ayub Sheikh respectively, among others announced the launch of NHSF. Consultant gastroenterologist Dr. Huma Qureshi, former head of PHRC, shared the salient features of the NHSF.

One of the key objectives of the strategy is to obtain a yearly increase in the diagnosis and treatment of Hepatitis B and C cases, and a yearly decrease in the number of new infections. But the success of this venture seems to be a big question.

Pakistan does not have a national hepatitis surveillance system, and as such, epidemiological data are weak. Federal and provincial data are often inadequate or not up to date. As such, the NHSF is based on limited epidemiological findings of the 2008 National Hepatitis Survey. The implementation of high-impact and targeted interventions will remain a far cry in the absence of more accurate data.