



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



**HEPATITIS SYMPOSIUM 2024 (28/08/24)**

The Symposium was held at Radisson Blu Hotel, Lusaka Zambia

*Theme: It's Time for Action  
With support from Abbott*



Figure 1 Group Photo of Symposium attendees

Present: A total of 80 participants with representation from Health care professionals, Ministry of Health delegates, civil society, international partners and the Sponsors.

### **Opening and welcoming remarks – Mrs. Lillian Mwila**

Opening remarks were made by Mrs. Lillian Mwila from HEP Initiative Zambia who thanked everyone from the Guest of Honor, representatives from various Organizations, speakers, and all attendees. She expressed how the Symposium brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from the health sector, government, civil society, and International Partners who shared one mission: To deepen understanding of viral Hepatitis, to explore effective strategies for its prevention and treatment, and to strengthen a collective resolve to eliminate this silent epidemic from Zambia. She echoed how the HEP Initiative believes in the power of collaboration and knowledge – sharing and how the Symposium was a testament to that belief. She expressed how the Initiative was grateful for the unwavering support from the sponsors Abbott who made this symposium a reality.



*Figure 2 Mrs Lillian Mwila from HEP Initiative giving opening remarks*

### **Opening address – By Dr. Lloyd Mulenga – Ministry of Health Director of Infectious Disease**

Professor Lloyd Mulenga informed the attendees that the Ministry had secured funds to be directed towards the fight and elimination of Hepatitis B. Prof. Mulenga also noted with concern that Hepatitis B has been neglected in Zambia and urged stakeholders to join hands in highlighting

the gravity of the condition in the country. He however, expressed happiness at the viral Hepatitis Initiative Symposium held in Lusaka, which brought various stakeholders together to share knowledge and best practices, describing it as a positive step.

Pro. Mulenga who officiated the event, also revealed that the Ministry had among others reserved some funds for pregnant women's health care in relation to the early detection and treatment of Hepatitis B.



Figure 3 Prof. Lloyd Mulenga - Infectious Diseases Specialist Ministry of Health giving an opening address

### **Keynote speech – By Pro. William Remark – Californian Hepatitis C Task Force Chair, Senior Advisor at Global Immunization Team**

Professor Remark joined in Virtually. He expressed happiness at being invited to speak at the Symposium. He narrated his first encounter with Hepatitis which started with a liver failure diagnosis when he was barely 14 years old. He mentioned how this is a human story and needs human efforts to mitigate it. Pro. Remark gave a narrative of how the Systems were then, during his diagnosis and how there have been great strides struck with regards to systems, the drive to change, and treatment availability. He indicated that the challenges Zambia is facing now is where they were in the United States many years ago. He urged Zambians not to relent, he mentioned how Zambians who are driving this call can bring help, knowledge, passion to the people in communities to help people. He urged everyone not to give up for their families, not to give up for their communities, and society as a whole. He called on everyone present to continue to educate, design and improve the systems, that way, the country will be on the path to eliminating Hepatitis. In closing, he mentioned how one day Zambia will be on top of this and all will see how it will bring happiness in communities they serve.

### **Viral Hepatitis Situation in Zambia by Dr. Edford Sinkala – Consultant Hepatologist**

He gave a brief background of where the fight against hepatitis came from, and where we are as a nation. He took the participants through the UTH support by the Hepatitis fund: Accelerate Program which aimed to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of a training program to develop local hepatitis experts, increase in health care professional competence, raise awareness among community health care workers and use monitoring and evaluation approach to analyze progress towards hepatitis elimination.



*Figure 4 Dr. Edford Sinkala - Consultant Hepatologist giving a presentation on the viral hepatitis situation in Zambia*

## **SESSION 2**

### **Hepatitis Response in Zambia**

#### **Presentation 1 by Dr. Lastone Chitembo – National Professional Officer for HIV/AIDS Programme at the World Health Organization**

The National Professional Officer for HIV/AIDS Programme at the World Health Organization Dr. Lastone Chilembo said, according to the prescribed WHO guidelines on Hepatitis B dose vaccine, requires that it be given within 24 hours of birth stating that it has chances of reducing 90 percent transmission rate and has since appealed for adherence to protocols.



Figure 5 Dr. Lastone Chitembo from WHO presenting on Hepatitis birth dose vaccine

## **Presentation 2: Dr. Micheal Vinikoor – Associate Professor at University of Alabama at Birmingham, Affiliated Researcher at Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia and University of Zambia School of Medicine**

Dr. Micheal explained how critical it is to have policies in place before implementation.

He narrated how in 2022, the team started a hepatitis Friday weekly clinic at the University Teaching Hospital, currently reaching 900+ individuals with care.

He talked about triple elimination - the idea that the HIV Prevention of Mother- To - Child Transmission program could be expanded to two other infections in pregnancies which are syphilis and hepatitis B.

By having one dedicated program, we can stamp out other infections. By 2030, we can eliminate hepatitis when we;

- ❖ Administer birth dose vaccine
- ❖ Test pregnant women
- ❖ Expand use of Tenofovir which lowers the chances of transmission

He indicated that when it comes to treatment, he could say Zambia is ready - due to the decentralized ART program, there are more than 500 places to receive tenofovir treatment in Zambia.

He further indicated that, while treatment sits on the shelf, testing kits were lacking. In the recent survey of 31 health facilities, 100% had tenofovir for HBV treatment, but less than half had testing kits in stock. He mentioned that there is a need for millions of testing kits each year which is 10 times more than there is now.

### **Presentation 3: Understanding Hepatitis B in Pediatrics: Strategies for effective prevention and Intervention – By Dr. Rose Chilufya, Ministry of Health.**

Dr. Chilufya said Mother- To – Child Transmission has been identified as a major mode through which Hepatitis B is spread among children in the country. She echoed that most babies get Hepatitis B from their mothers, indicating that it is for this reason that caregivers continuously advise new mothers to get their children vaccinated against the disease and to also practice good nipple hygiene to prevent the transmission rate that occurs through breastfeeding. Dr. Chilufya also disclosed that about 5 percent of babies that are infected by Hepatitis B, test positive for HIV. She further bemoaned a lack of enough research on Hepatitis B in children whilst underlining the limited availability of information which is mostly based on cases from adult patients.



*Figure 6 Dr. Rose Chilufya - University Teaching Hospital Pediatrician Ministry of Health presenting on understanding hepatitis in pediatrics: strategies for effective prevention and intervention*

## **SESSION 3**

### **Hepatitis Response in Key Population. Experience and Lessons Learned**

#### **Presentation 1: Dr. Phillip Bruggerman – Switzerland**

Dr. Phillip indicated that viral hepatitis is a major health issue among People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) globally. He highlighted that there has been an increasing epidemic of injecting drug use in Africa - increasing risk of hepatitis B and C epidemic among PWIDs.

He acknowledged that the good news is, viral hepatitis can be efficiently prevented among People Who Inject Drugs by;

- ❖ Crucial implementation and upscaling of such harm reduction measures
- ❖ Increasing awareness and decreasing drug law enforcement
- ❖ Vaccination for Hepatitis B

## Presentation 2: Dr. Edgar Mutimushi – Zambia Correctional Services

Dr. Mutimushi highlighted the challenges that are there in the Correctional Facilities, the congestion and how that is a catalyst for Disease transmission. He requested for support with regards to Hepatitis and bemoaned the lack of awareness, access to testing among prison staff as well as inmates.



Figure 7 Dr. Edgar Mutimushi from Zambia Correctional Services

## Presentation 3: Isaac Nkandu Mwakilima – LATU Foundation

LATU Human Rights Foundation representative shared how the Organization had conducted an STI landscape analysis which showed that;

- there was erratic supply of STI screening and management commodities
- Lack of proper coordination mechanisms for STI management
- Inadequate literature on the STI program in Zambia and policy implementation to Govern the National STI Program

In line with Hepatitis, LATU is working in collaboration with HEP Initiative Zambia. They are doing Hepatitis B case finding to complement efforts in CAB - LA intervention, linking those who test positive for further management, advocating for free vaccination for front line workers and sub populations. Key to note is how LATU and HEP Initiative Zambia have teamed up to ensure Key Population Civil Society Organizations in KP Wellness centers across PEPFAR and Global

fund sites will be capacity built.



Figure 8 Isaac Nkandu Mw from LATU Foundation presenting on the Hepatitis response among Key Population

## QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

- ❖ Mr. Mulubwa engaged Pro. Lloyd Mulenga on what they are doing as a Ministry on Community engagement? Funding for Civil Society - Lloyd in response that there is a grant under Global Funds that is available - will be given to civil society and part of it will be channeled to community engagement

- ❖ Gift - Health Literacy Zambia asked Dr. Rose Chilufya about the availability of Test kits to test pregnant women for Hepatitis, is it really done?

In response, Dr. Chilufya indicated that there are gaps and there is a need to engage the government and other stakeholders to ensure availability of test kits in all health facilities.

- ❖ Dr. Chituwo asked questions on the School Health Programs presented by Mr. Mulubwa who was presenting. He wanted to find out about how this came about. He informed the participants how the Rotary club initiated the school health program and is open to continue providing support.

More questions and responses were provided during the networking lunch which was very interactive.



## NETWORKING LUNCH & ENTERTAINMENT

### SESSION 4

#### Hepatitis in schools - School Health Program in collaboration with the Ministry of General Education

**Presentation: Mr. Mulumbwa – Health Promotion Officer, Ministry of Health**

Mr Mulubwa presented on School Health Programs in collaboration with the Ministry of General Education. He explained how these have been mainstreamed in the school set up and its benefits to learners. He talked about Health rooms that are found at implementing schools and how they help prevent the spread of infections by quickly pulling sick learners out of the classroom environment and having them stay in these spaces. These spaces are especially helpful for girl students in need of a comfortable space to rest.



Figure 9 Mr Mulumbwa Health Promotion Officer Ministry of Health

## SESSION 5

### Harm Reduction

#### Presentation 1: Kennedy Mutale - Decisive Minds

The Decisive Minds representative mentioned that the Organization is working in five local communities where drug use is high, in collaboration with religious, community and civic leaders who are engaged through stakeholder meetings.

He pointed out how People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) are particularly vulnerable to contract Hepatitis B & C when sharing injections. He added that estimates show a 39% prevalence among People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) across the world (6.1 million people).

Decisive minds provide;

- ❖ Community sensitization
- ❖ Harm reduction information for people who use and inject drugs
- ❖ Hepatitis prevention and treatment messages
- ❖ Drug use therapy and mental health services
- ❖ Individual therapy, peer recovery support groups
- ❖ Psycho- education groups to improve the well- being of participants
- ❖ Referrals to health facilities and empowerment services



Figure 10 Kennedy Mutale from Decisive Minds presenting on harm reduction among People Who Inject Drugs

## **Presentation 2: Dr. Andrew Scheiber – International Network on Health, Hepatitis and substance users.**

Dr. Andrew presented on Opioid use, harm reduction and viral hepatitis integration. He did an overview of the situation with regards to drug trafficking and health issues in Africa. He listed a number of things that are essential to impact when dealing with harm reduction;

- ❖ Removing punitive laws, policies and practices
- ❖ Reducing stigma and discrimination
- ❖ Community empowerment
- ❖ Addressing violence

He made a call to everyone to join hands in ensuring they demand that harm reduction and viral hepatitis services are integrated and funded domestically.

## **SESSION 6**

### **Collaboration & Partnerships for improved coordination, impact & equity**

#### **Presentation 1: Dr. Chilungamika Nyendwa Rotary Club representative**

They shared their experience with regards to the project they started in 2021 called zero Hepatitis Initiative. They shared their plans on, they invited the HEP Initiative to see areas of collaboration. They are basically creating awareness, collaborations with other stakeholders to fight Hepatitis. Much of their activities speak to other works they have done



Figure 11 Dr. Chilungamika Nyendwa representing the Rotary club

## **Presentation 2: Jessica Hicks – World Hepatitis Alliance**

She shared about the work that the World Hepatitis Alliance which is;

- ❖ To lead the fight against Hepatitis through awareness creation, championing civil society and advocate to change the course of Hepatitis
- ❖ She shared how the World Hepatitis Alliance has put hepatitis on the Global health agenda, and through advocacy, made World Hepatitis Day an internationally recognized global health day. - driving the response, committed to hepatitis elimination, inclusion in the UN Declaration on Universal Health Coverage.

She stressed the importance of collaboration to enhance service delivery.

## **SESSION 7**

### **Hepatitis Advocacy for Action & Impact (A call to Action)**

#### **Kennedy Kabagambe- Executive Director National Organization for People Living with Hepatitis in Uganda**

Kennedy explained how his organization is well known for advocating for extending quality services to men, women, children and youth in 3 program areas;

- ❖ Health and wellbeing
- ❖ Human rights
- ❖ Economic strengthening

He expressed the capacity and experience to address hepatitis B and other health disparities in the communities

## **SESSION 8**

### **People Living with Hepatitis – Lived Experiences**

#### **Cosmin Oprea – Independent Researcher Romania**

Cosmin presented on People with lived experience overcoming stigma and discrimination. He narrated the challenges he went through navigating his acceptance of his condition, and society challenges with regards to the stigma surrounding People Living With Hepatitis. He mentioned that a lot of education needs to be done to enable people to understand, embrace and support people living with Hepatitis. That way, it will lessen the barriers of access to services, disclosure, uptake of treatment services that are available and adherence.

### **Closing remarks – Pro. Mwewa**

In his closing remarks, Prof. Mwewa spoke about the importance of having such symposiums, the benefits of bringing various stakeholders together, he called on all stakeholders to come together to support the government to help eliminate Hepatitis. He thanked Abbot for the support, urged more donors to come on board and emulate what Abbott has done in terms of support.

### **Key outcomes and recommendations**

- ❖ Increased awareness: The symposium successfully raised awareness about the burden of viral Hepatitis in Zambia
- ❖ Knowledge sharing: Healthcare professionals gained insights into the latest prevention, diagnosis, and treatment strategies and options
- ❖ Networking: The event provided a platform for stakeholders to network and collaborate on Hepatitis- related initiatives

Actionable recommendations

### **Media coverage and publicity-**

- ❖ ZNBC, Diamond TV, Ministry of Health Communications Departments provided media coverage
- ❖ The event was streamed live on the Ministry of Health page by the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation's media team who covered the event
- ❖ Published on the Ministry of Health Facebook page
- ❖ It was aired as a headline on the Zambia National Broadcaster
- ❖ Hashtags, number of mentions - 5
- ❖ Number of post sharing - 4

### **Recommendations**

Timely support of activities - support should not only come when there are Conferences or on World Hepatitis Day.

People who need the help the most are people in the communities who have been disproportionately affected by Hepatitis – We need a lot of community engagement, Education and testing, then linkage to care and psychosocial support

### **Conclusion**

We would like to thank Abbott for sponsoring the first ever Hepatitis Symposium in Zambia. We appreciate Abbott leadership at National level through Mr.Mwewa who is the Country Abbott Manager, for showing leadership and engaging all stakeholders involved. We also want to extend our gratitude to the regional leadership in South Africa for helping us get the proposal approved and ensuring that the event was a success. The Viral Hepatitis Symposium Organized by HEP Initiative Zambia, with the support of Abbott, was a significant step towards addressing the Hepatitis burden in Zambia. The event successfully brought together key stakeholders, facilitated meaningful discussions, and laid the groundwork for future initiatives aimed at eliminating viral Hepatitis by 2030.

# PHOTO GALLERY



Figure 12 Representatives from Abbott - Mr. Mwewa, Sumesh and Yuthika



Figure 13 Dr. Nyendwa from Zambia Rotary Club



Figure 14 Dr. Mutimushi from Zambia Correctional Services



Figure 15 Dr. Brian Chitwwo - Former Ministry of Health Minister and Rotarian



Figure 16 Dr. Chitembo World Health Organization representative, HEP Initiative CEO Mr. Mwape Chisonde, Dr. Rose Chilufya Ministry of Health, Prof. Lloyd Mulenga Ministry of Health





*Figure 17 delegates following the deliberations during a panel discussion at the symposium*



Figure 18 HEP Initiative CEO and Mrs Lillian Mwila representing HEP Initiative



Figure 19 Prof. Mwewa



Figure 20 The Nomakanjani Dance Group entertaining the audience with various cultural dances during the symposium