

The globalization of Chagas disease: A new challenge for elimination

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Since the discovery of Chagas disease 100 years ago, great achievements have been obtained. The acknowledgement of this successful fight has been reflected in the resolution adopted by WHO member states during the 51st World Health Assembly in 1998, calling for the elimination of the disease (WHA.51.14). As progresses are going on, the strategy for elimination is slightly changing and a new push was called by Chagas specialists around the world. To respond to this request, the Director General of the WHO established in July 2007 a WHO Global Network for Chagas disease Elimination, in order to propose a new framework for reaching the goal of elimination.

Five main challenges were identified in addition to the necessity of continuing efforts for interrupting transmission:

- Ensuring the sustainability of control activities in countries which became low endemic.
- Emergence of the disease in territories considered until now as free of the disease, like the Amazon Basin, with alternative mechanisms of transmission.
- Chagas disease re-emergence in territories like in Gran Chaco area.
- Ensuring a timely diagnostic and treatment access to the infected population, including access to specific treatment for chronic patients.
- The globalization of the disease in non endemic countries like USA, Canada, Europe, Japan and others, due to an increasing mobility of population from Latin America to the rest of the world.

This particular issue of globalization has been stressed as a crucial problem, and at the request of many countries, WHO decided to provide support to various countries aiming at the establishment of a "non endemic inter-governmental initiative". A first meeting took place in Paris, 22-23 November 2007 in order to assess the situation in all possible non endemic countries. The framework of the new initiative will be established during the second meeting in Barcelona, 5-6 February 2007. The main goals for this initiative will be to establish a network aiming at harmonizing procedures for taking care of blood and transplant transmission, prevention of materno-foetal transmission, care of chronic patients and diagnostic and screening procedures.

This initiative would be proposed to member states for their endorsement.