WHO endorses public health care
Geneva meeting shortened to fight new influenza virus

LEIPZIG, Germany/GENEVA, Switzerland: The improvement of primary health care and pandemic influenza preparedness are two of the main resolutions adopted at this year’s World Health Assembly in Switzerland. Last week, the 193 Member States adopted a final plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property, which includes an agreed list of stakeholders who will be involved in the process, as well as a time frame and indicators by which to monitor progress. The plan of action aims, amongst other things, to reduce exclusion and social disparities in health-care systems worldwide and to promote public policy reforms in order to integrate health into all public sectors.

The WHO World Health Report 2008 found striking inequities in health outcomes and the access to care. Globally, annual government expenditure on health varies from as little as US$20 per person to well over US$86,000. For 5.6 billion people in low- and middle-income countries, more than half of all health-care expenditure is out-of-pocket payments.

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This year’s meeting in Geneva was closed after only five days to give senior health officials the chance to return to their home countries and prepare for a possible influenza pandemic.

During the high-level consultation on the new H1N1 virus, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan was called upon to consider criteria other than geographical spread when evaluating the phases of influenza pandemic. Dr Chan further stated that her decision to declare an influenza pandemic would consider the scientific information available and would be supported by advice from the Emergency Committee, a body of international experts established in compliance with the International Health Regulations. The Director-General outlined what might be seen, based on current knowledge, as the virus continues to spread over the coming weeks and months.

She called for close monitoring of the virus as cases begin to appear in the Southern Hemisphere, where the new virus will have opportunity to inter-mingle with other currently circulating influenza viruses as the season at winter influenza epidemic begins.

This photo shows a model of the new Oral Health Centre in Brisbane in Australia. Completion personnel.

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