

## Minutes of the webinar meeting of AHRER

**Date:** 21.05.2020

**Venue:** Google Meet

**Time:** 07.00 PM-08.00 PM

### Presiding members

Name	Specialty	Location
Prof. Dr. Nimesh Desai	Psychiatry	Delhi
Dr. Vikas Punamiya	Pulmonology	Mumbai
Mr. Samrat Choudhery	AVI-Consumer Advocacy	Mumbai
Mr. Dhaval Gogate	Informatics Specialist,	Pune
Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha	Public Health	Chennai
Dr. Vikas Jain	Pediatrics	Indore

The meeting of Association for Harm reduction Education & Research (AHRER) was convened on 21.05.2020 at **-7.00 PM-08.00 PM on web portal of Google Meet**. The members discussed the following issues:

- 1. Round of introductions:** Members introduced briefly about their professional backgrounds. Dr. Desai and Dr. Vikas Punmaiya were joining in this meeting for the first time and Mr. Samrat suggested that Dr. Desai be included in Nicotine-India and Nicotine-Policy google groups to be in constant touch with emerging science and global experts involved in Tobacco Harm Reduction.
- 2. Brief presentation of Harm Reduction articles shared by Prof. Sharan:** Dr. Sre presented a brief summary of the two articles 1. Harm reduction strategies among adolescents for prevention of STI and unwanted pregnancies 2. Harm reduction for prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.
- 3. Presentation by Mr. Dhaval:** Mr. Dhaval, shared his research project aiming for capacity building of health care professionals (HCP) in Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR) by the following measures:
  - Base-line survey assessing knowledge, attitude and practices towards THR
  - Developing THR education materials incorporating both Indian and International guidelines
  - Conducting workshops for HCP
  - Tracking and documenting any change in practices related to THR after the provision of educational materials and workshops
  - A dissemination event to share the findings from this research with multiple stakeholders.
- 4. Potential for synergies and collaborations:** Dr. Vikas Punamiya, shared about the research module his organization ARISE is involved in developing especially for smokeless tobacco-SLT involving consumers and HCP and suggested that Dhaval's research will be very important.

- Dr. Sre shared about Qualitative Research study currently she is involved with assessing care practices of HCP in THR. It was suggested by Dr. Punamiya that it can be extended to Maharashtra clinicians to get a comprehensive understanding on the same.
  - Dr. Desai recommended including Psychiatrists too as they mostly are involved in alcohol and OST and thus will identify the gaps in their clinical practice towards THR.
  - Mr. Dhaval will work closely with Dr. Punamiya, Dr. Sre to clearly establish the scope for collaboration for his research with AHRER. Dr. Desai also reiterated that multi-disciplinary partnerships and collaborations will enhance AHRER profile and we should endeavor towards this.
5. **Scope of SLT and THR:** Dr. Desai raised the query whether SLT products in India and also Asia such as khaini, ghutka, zarda can be considered as reduced risk products to smoking? Dr. Punamiya shared work done through HRRIC, for SLT product analysis including Indian Snus product. Mr. Samrat narrated the historical evolution of Swedish Snus as most potential alternative for risk reduction and shared his interaction with the Indian Snus makers. The risk differentials between SLT and Snus products was also elaborated.  
\*\*Dr. Desai proposed that there is need for further debate amongst ourselves to strategize on promotion of SLT-Snus as harm reducing alternative.
6. **Conflict of Interest:** Dr. Desai raised another query asking whether prescribing NRT products and Varenicline as tobacco cessation treatment by members in this Association amounts to Conflict of Interest (COI) and Dr. Punamiya and Dr. Sre submitted that as per current national guidelines that is the standard care being practiced in the country and thus will not amount to COI.
7. **Multi-modal/tailor made interventions:** Discussions with contributions from Dr. Punamiya, Dr. Desai and Dr. Sre pointed that combination of counselling, NRT and prescription of Varenicline etc is more potential in assisting as per the clients' needs for tobacco cessation and Mr. Samrat suggested thus a bouquet of choices and options to be made available for Indian consumers. Quitlines to be adequately supported by other low-risk alternatives for consumers.
8. **Mental Health Care Act 2017:** Dr. Desai shared the components of MH Care act which identified mental health as human right, and proposed that including tobacco dependence in ICD, and identifying tobacco dependence related care and treatment as human right may be the approach to consider. A public interest litigation (PIL) may be raised towards this end.
9. **Membership Expansion:** The scope of expanding the membership to include multi-disciplinary professionals and suggestions were requested from participating members and Dr. Punamiya suggested approaching Dr. Samir to be part of the AHRER. It is recommended that membership can be steadily increased to bring participation from diverse backgrounds to enrich the scope of work for AHRER.

10. **Constituting Expert Panel for AHRER:** Dr. Sre shared that AHRER will approach global and national experts to provide mentorship for AHRER and requested Dr. Desai to be part of national expert panel for AHRER and was accepted. We thank Dr. Desai for his support and engagement with AHRER from its inception.
11. **RTI Application:** As the discussions in the meeting were centered around the lack of accessibility and poor affordability of NRT products such as gums, lozenges, patches etc by low-income population groups, Mr. Dhaval volunteered to file RTI application to elicit information on subsidized NRT provision in government hospitals across the country.
12. **COVID and smoking cessation:** It was discussed that recent studies showed the COVID impacted smokers' attitudes towards quitting and to sustain the health behavior changes the government should take pro-active measures. Dr. Sre suggested may be the AHRER can write to government of India to support this attitudinal shift by making NRT products widely available at affordable prices.
13. **3T Research updates:** Dr. Sre shared with audience that 3T: Tuberculosis, Tobacco and THR was cleared by Ethics Committee and will be undertaken soon. Any funding sources may be shared to apply for a grant.
14. **Monthly webinar:** It was proposed to host a monthly webinar to continue the discussions and to facilitate more participation from members the timing is agreed as 8.30 PM-9.30PM.
15. **Recap and closure:** After a quick recap by Dr. Sre, all members agreed to meet for next meeting on June 24th, 8.30 PM-9.30 PM to advance the vision and mission of AHRER.

\*The minutes were drafted by Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha, AHRER

#### Suggestions and contribution to specific items discussed during the call

Item	Suggestions	Contributions
<b>Membership Expansion</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop membership documents/process</li> <li>2. Free membership would be ideal for 3-6 months at least</li> <li>3. All members can recommend AHRER to their peers and include them in future meetings and discussions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Samrat to guide or provide insights</li> <li>2. Dr. Punamiya will approach Dr. Samir</li> </ol>
<b>Research Collaboration</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Dhaval, Dr. Punamiya and Dr. Sre will evolve the action plan</li> <li>2. Dr. Sre will share the qualitative research interview guide with Dr. Punamiya for inclusion of more clinicians</li> </ol>	

<b>RTI</b>	1. Mr. Dhaval will file RTI about NRT in government hospitals	
<b>Establishment of Expert Panel</b>	1. We can draft request mail to identified experts in the minutes and ask them to be officially identified with AHRER as expert panel members	1. Dr. Sre will write to Dr. Atul Ambekar
<b>AHRER-Research Topics</b>	1. 3T's: Tobacco Tuberculosis and THR	1. 3T's: Drs. CC and Sre are working on this and further partnerships are invited. 2. Any funding opportunities and grant application resources are to be shared to get research funds.

**Next AHRER meeting proposed on : June 24<sup>st</sup>, 8.30 PM-9.30 PM**