Preface

Rubella and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination: Lessons Learned for the Future

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The Region of the Americas has had a longstanding record of disease eradication and elimination initiatives. It was the first Region of the world to interrupt the indigenous transmission of smallpox, polio, and measles. Most recently, the Americas have eliminated rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). Strategies that were tested and implemented in this Region have served as models for global initiatives. The process leading to rubella elimination was neither simple nor painless, and many lessons can be learned from this initiative.

Such lessons learned have also provided the foundation for other disease elimination/eradication programs based on the principles of equity, solidarity, and Pan Americanism. We have learned that sustained political will and leadership are as important in eradicating infectious diseases as are scientific developments and technological innovations.

Likewise, without public trust and effective communication strategies raising awareness about the importance of vaccination, disease elimination is impossible. In a practical sense, the experience of rubella elimination reminds us of the importance of community participation, the mobilization of resources and personnel at the local level, and the need to adapt public health strategies to local culture and customs. The rubella elimination initiative was truly a team and global effort, and we will do well to remember that involving public health professionals and leaders at every level is necessary for success.

The accomplishment of rubella elimination has only been possible through the sustained efforts of Member States, the strong political commitment in both local and national levels, the continued dedication of the international community, and the unwavering determination of health workers and volunteers. The experience of the Region in rubella elimination has demonstrated that we can conquer a disease if we work in unison, recognizing the strength of team work and embracing the richness of diversity among people and communities. No country is too big or too small, too rich or too poor, when it comes to making a contribution to regional public health. Everyone’s efforts and collaboration are needed. I have been fortunate to experience such collaboration working as a PAHO representative in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. It was truly awe inspiring.

Sharing of information and experiences between countries has been critical for reaching common goals in all parts of the world. I sincerely hope the readers find these articles useful in their work. Working together we can make a real difference.