

The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination Names Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas as 2021 Elimination Champion

– Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas, Director of the National Council for AIDS Prevention and Control (CENSIDA), is honored for her leadership in developing a national hepatitis C elimination program-

Atlanta, GA., July 23, 2020 – In honor of World Hepatitis Day, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination is pleased to announce Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas was selected as a 2021 Elimination Champion for her visionary leadership and commitment to hepatitis elimination in Mexico.

In 2018, she was appointed as Head of the National Council for AIDS Prevention and Control (CENSIDA) for the Mexico Secretary of Health. In 2019, based on her clinical expertise, knowledge of primary care, organizational skills and previous achievements, she was asked to lead the development and implementation of a national program to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030. She oversaw the development of the National Action Plan for Hepatitis C for 2020 to 2024. The goals set for 2020 included:

- Identify and treat 20,000 patients with hepatitis C in 2020;
- Treat previously identified patients with viremic hepatitis C;
- Eliminate hepatitis C in co-infected patients with HIV;
- Ensure access to treatment for patients detected in blood banks;
- Screen unaccepted candidates for donations at blood banks.

To meet this bold request, Dr. de la Torre relied on innovative approaches to design a comprehensive program with equity at its core. She ensured the program focused on achieving universal access, unifying the health system, implementing a primary healthcare approach, and prioritizing high-risk populations. To start with, she initiated a multisector National Working Group that meets every 15 days, made up of key government departments, clinicians and researchers, community leaders, and PAHO. A medical training program, known as (EDUCADS), was developed to increase the number of primary care providers able to treat hepatitis C. To date, EDUCADS has reached over 70,000 healthcare workers and 70 clinical leads. One of the greatest innovations of the program is a digital surveillance program, or observatory, to monitor the efficacy of the program nationally. This observatory follows each patient’s diagnosis and treatment and produces real-time facility-level data on the number of persons screened, treated, and cured to inform policy decision-making.

Dr. John W. Ward, Director of the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination reflects, “Dr. de la Torre’s commitment to innovation and development of a national observatory will bolster Mexico’s efforts to eliminate hepatitis C. Few countries have developed such a national database to track progress towards national elimination goals, and this type of data is critical to public health planning and action.”

As of 2020, the national hepatitis C program had screened over 46,745 persons and treated 8,163 persons under Dr. de la Torre’s leadership. Hepatitis C elimination among people living with HIV remains within reach. Through early 2021, over 98,000 tests were administered among people living with HIV. In all, 1,260 patients were identified to be co-infected with HIV and hepatitis C, and 79% have been linked to care.

Dr. David Kershenobich, Director General of the National Institute of Medical Sciences and Nutrition “Salvador Zubirán” (INCMNSZ) and 2020 Elimination Champion says of Dr. de la Torre, “She has fully and diligently committed herself to put in place creative ideas and design the required strategies [for

hepatitis C elimination], particularly to assure the equity of the program in order to not leave any patient with hepatitis C behind the elimination program. I would also like to bring to your attention her integrity and continuous strive for knowledge.”

Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas was trained as a physician in internal medicine and infectious diseases and received a Master’s in Public Health from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine School. Prior to her work at CENSIDA, she was part of the advisory committee during the influenza pandemic in 2009. At the National Institute of Medical Sciences and Nutrition she has been a member of the Infectious Disease Department and head of the Natural Disasters Department.

“The fight against hepatitis cannot wait, it is essential to generate coordinated multi-sectoral strategies that have people and communities at the center. Today more than ever it is important not to leave anyone behind, within the framework of human rights, through a vision of continuous improvement that allows the strengthening of primary health care and integrated service networks. Health promotion actions are fundamental for the empowerment and activation of people and communities, for the timely identification and treatment of people with Hepatitis C, as well as for the prevention of new infections,” says Dr. de la Torre.

In all, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination honors six Elimination Champions for 2021. The other champions selected were:

- Mr. Arafat Bwambale, Uganda, Great Lakes Peace Centre
- Dr. Gamal Shiha, Egypt, Egyptian Liver Research Institute and Hospital
- Professor John Dillon, Scotland, University of Dundee and National Health Service Tayside
- Dr. Mohammad Ali, Bangladesh, National Liver Foundation of Bangladesh
- Rachel Gonzalez and Dr. Angela Park, United States, United States Department of Veterans Affairs

The Elimination Champion initiative was launched in 2019 and aims to recognize the remarkable contributions of individuals to improved political commitment, policies, and programs that expand access to interventions and accelerate progress toward hepatitis elimination, particularly in areas with limited resources.

“The Coalition salutes the Hepatitis Elimination Champions from six countries bound by a shared commitment to eliminating hepatitis as a health threat for their patients and communities. These Champions are committed to achieving health equity, the ultimate goal of hepatitis elimination, by fighting hepatitis-related stigma, advocating for government action and expanding access to hepatitis testing and treatment through capacity building and developing simplified models of care. Because of their actions and the example they set for others, the world is that much closer to the goals for eliminating hepatitis. Congratulations and thank you,” says Dr. John Ward, Director of the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination.

The Elimination Champion 2020 nominations were opened from May 1st to June 5th, 2020. Over 20 nominations were received from 17 countries. A panel of judges representing previous Elimination Champions, elimination program managers, the major liver disease professional associations, civil society, and donors assessed the nominations. Champions will receive awards by mail and their profiles will be added to <https://www.globalhep.org/champions>.

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is commemorated each year on 28 July to enhance awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes a range of health problems, including liver cancer. There are five main strains of the hepatitis virus – A, B, C, D and E. Together, hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) are the most common, with 328 million people living with HBV or HCV globally and more than 1.3 million lives lost each year. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, viral hepatitis continues to claim thousands of lives every day. See more at <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hepatitis-day/2020>.

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

With the availability of reliable tests, highly protective hepatitis B vaccines, effective HBV medications, and curative HCV therapies in hand, in 2016, the WHO set targets for HBV and HCV elimination by 2030. The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (CGHE) was launched in July 2019 to accelerate progress toward these goals. Modelled after other disease elimination initiatives managed by the Task Force for Global Health, CGHE aims to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational hepatitis elimination programs through advocacy, technical assistance, knowledge generation, and dissemination among partners united in a community of practice. Find out more at www.globalhep.org.

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