Abstract

Strategic Harmonization of Training on Biosecurity for Laboratories in the ECOWAS Region [†]

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Abstract: Background: Good laboratory practices in terms of biosecurity and biosafety are essential for the protection of laboratory personnel, the populations and the environment. If not implemented, the risk of pathogen spreading from the laboratory is conceivable. In addition, in current African geopolitical context, the reliable practices such as the protection, control and tracking of valuable biological material will prevent their loss, theft, uncontrolled access and potential misuse. WAHO, with the support of KfW is implementing trainings of trainers on biosecurity in the ECOWAS region in a project called PROALAB. PROALAB team realized that many partners were aiming at implementing in parallel quite similar non internationally certified programs in the ECOWAS region. Therefore, PROALAB decided to organize a meeting of key stakeholders in order to pool efforts, avoid duplication, and harmonize strategies and procedures. **Objective:** Develop a harmonized strategy and harmonized procedures for the training of health professionals in biosecurity/biosafety and biohazard risk management in ECOWAS member countries to pass internationally certified biosafety and biosecurity examinations. **Methods:** Programs of each of the institutions were presented and discussed. A regional program on biosecurity/biosafety training was elaborated during group working and a regional program of certification of trainers was discussed and validated. A work plan and timeline were developed through group working. **Results:** In the ECOWAS region, some countries are more advanced in biosecurity training. Training is generally organized by national biosecurity associations with the

support of the IFBA or other partners (WHO, FMx, PHE, etc.). Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Mali seem more advanced and could be solicited to organize training for less-advanced countries. The IFBA certification covers five domains: (1) Biorisk management, (2) biosecurity, (3) biosafety cabinet, (4) biological waste management and (5) biocontainment facility. The technical working group decided consensually that basic training for biosecurity managers in the laboratories should cover the first two domains. More advanced experts advising governments should be trained in the other domains progressively. Progressive training could be built on the 3 levels Nigerian/Ivoirian system of “basic-advanced-consolidated (or expert)” system. Existing module from WHO, FMx, IPD, IPCI and other ECOWAS countries should be adapted to match the international certification needs. Practical training should also be organized in the laboratory by the same institutions that will be allowed to deliver a practical certificate on behalf of WAHO. **Conclusion:** With the extension of laboratory activities in the context of strengthening the surveillance programs in the ECOWAS region, more expertise on biosecurity is needed. With the support of national biosecurity associations, WAHO could play a role in harmonizing reinforcing training on biosecurity and legislation.

Keywords: biosecurity; biosafety; training; harmonized strategy; ECOWAS

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