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Major Strides For Mercury-Free Health Care:

Argentina bans mercury blood pressure devices

Philippines to ban import of mercury-based medical devices

Buenos Aires and Manila: Argentina and the Philippines, the two countries leading the developing world in substituting mercury-based medical devices with safe, accurate and affordable alternatives, took significant steps to implement and strengthen their national mercury-free health care policies.

On February 16, the Minister of Health of Argentina, Dr. Juan Luis Manzur, issued an [Administrative Decision](#) prohibiting “the production, import, sale or free transfer of mercury column blood pressure sphygmomanometers to be used by the general population, medical doctors or veterinarians.” Imports will be halted immediately, and all sales will cease within six months.

“This decision is a huge step forward,” said Veronica Odriozola, Latin America Coordinator for Health Care Without Harm which has led the campaign for such restrictions. “It broadens and deepens the [Ministry’s resolution of almost exactly one year ago](#),” calling on hospitals and health centers to purchase only mercury-free thermometers and blood pressure devices. Odriozola praised the health ministry, on the one-year anniversary of the resolution, and called for further action. Together with leading health groups in the country, HCWH is asking pharmacies to phase-out their sale of mercury thermometers, while providing alternatives to the general public. “We are taking mercury out of hospitals, but we need to remove this toxic threat from our homes as well,” said Odriozola.

At nearly the same time in the Philippines, the country’s Secretary of Health, Dr. Esperanza Cabral met with the leadership of HCWH South East Asia to discuss challenges in implementing the country’s two year phase-out of mercury-based medical devices. As a result of the meeting, and citing global movement on the issue, Secretary Cabral announced that the department has stopped issuing permits to sell mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers. She likewise said that the department will work to [ban importation](#) of all health products containing mercury.

The Secretary also made several other commitments, including: to release budgetary funds for hospitals to purchase mercury-free medical devices; to sign an HCWH pledge calling on all electoral candidates to support mercury-free health care; and to step up the national implementation of the [Administrative Order](#) issued in August 2008 mandating mercury-free health care within two years.

"The Philippines has been a leader in creating policies for substituting mercury-based medical devices. Policy is one thing, but implementation is another. Now that the DoH has taken a firmer stand for mercury-free health care, we are enjoining the health care sector, other government and non-government agencies, electoral candidates and the general public to support this effort," said Faye Ferrer, HCWH Mercury Campaign Coordinator for SE Asia.

The aggressive efforts by the Health Ministries in both countries are seen as bolstering initiatives in many other countries including Brazil, Chile, China, India, Mexico and South Africa where hospitals and health care systems are also switching out their mercury-based medical devices in favor of safer, accurate and affordable alternatives. "These actions are important achievements that will help push for such initiatives in other developing countries," said Priti Mahesh, a Senior Programme Officer with Toxics Link, an HCWH partner organization in India.

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