

Health Care Without Harm  
Opening Statement  
IP3 1 October 2019

I would like to add my thank you to President Sahler, the co-chairs and the Secretariat for their work in preparation for this critical meeting. And to the government and people of Thailand for the warm welcome and hospitality for this meeting.

My name is Susan Wilburn. I work with Health Care Without Harm on sustainability in the health sector and represent health sector civil society on the Bureau of SAICM.

We, health sector civil society, are health professionals, nurses and doctors, laboratorian, educators and researchers in academic settings – working in many settings including hospitals and communities. We are public health practitioners and are here to support the Beyond 2020 framing and to ensure that health is a key aspect of the sound management of chemicals and waste. We are here because health is directly linked to chemicals and waste both for good and for ill.

We take care of you and your families when your children suffer neurological damage from exposure to mercury and other heavy metals. We are the first responders when children are poisoned from pesticides – because of exposure in agricultural areas near their home or take-home toxins on the clothes of their mothers and fathers when they have been sprayed while working.

We care for the mothers who deliver babies with birth defects from chemical exposure.

We care for our patients with heart attacks and chronic lung disease as a result of Air pollution from the burning of coal in coal-fired power plants, burning of medical waste or fossil fuels.

We worry that antibiotics that saved the generation of our grandparents will no longer be effective as a result of pharmaceutical waste that is poorly managed or pollution from the manufacturing of drugs.

And sometimes the patients for whom we are caring are colleagues made ill from an occupational exposure. The environment in which we work is highly hazardous. Health workers have high rates of asthma from occupational exposure to disinfectants and sterilants, Health workers suffer miscarriages from exposure to chemicals and gases at work.

And health care waste is hazardous to our communities – we are contributing the pollution and need the health and environment sectors to work together so that the health care sector follows the Hippocratic oath to ‘first do no harm’.

In the interest of time, I want to make two points:

- 1) To support the multi-sector and multi-stakeholder nature of SAICM for the protection of human health and to emphasize the importance of greater collaboration between the sectors and stakeholders, and
- 2) To share a lasting impact of the Quick Start Program within Health Care Without Harm's network of Global Green and Healthy Hospitals that has grown to include over 36,000 health care facilities in 60 countries on all continents.

We need more examples of good practice improving health and environment through collaboration. HCWH is working together with WHO and UNDP in African countries together with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment to phase out mercury and implement sound waste management of health care waste using systems that use technology that does not produce dioxins and furans. We are working together with UNDP, WHO and development agencies to set standards and develop an index for sustainable procurement of health products and services. The standards will address pharmaceutical pollution from manufacturing in support of the SAICM Issue of Concern. This work requires collaboration between sectors and civil society working together on the ground to implement and scale-up health protecting actions.

I want to share the lasting impact of the Quick Start Programme and importance of a financing mechanism to include Civil society funding for projects. Two weeks ago, I attended a regional Green and Healthy Hospitals conference in Medellin, Colombia where a colleague from a hospital in Argentina, who was a pioneer in the substitution of toxic chemicals for less toxic disinfectants and intravenous materials initiated through the QSP, in 2012, reported on continued progress in the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste. A second hospital from the HCWH regional network, Salud Sin Dano, when receiving an award for their "Less Footprint, More Health" (*Menos Huella, Mas Salud*) work on sustainability reported that their journey started when they 'met Mirta' who was the pioneering environmental health leader in the first hospital. They continue to meet and learn from one another to share good practices and work together to address challenges. <https://noharm-asia.org/issues/asia/saferchem-management-saicm-and-kemi-projects#s>

WE cannot afford to lose this legacy – a second generation scaling up the impact from SAICM support.

Health professional see the cost of inaction every day in our work and are counting on the delegates in this room to work hard together in the next few days across disciplines and stakeholders to advance SAICM Beyond 2020 so that this time next year, we will be on the verge of finalizing a highly ambitious, sustainably financed SAICM 2.0 to protect health and the environment from toxic chemicals with targets and indicators that allow us to measure progress and identify safer alternatives.

Thank you.