

## MORE PHARMACEUTICAL NEWS

### **WHO lashes out at baby formula companies**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) blames infant formula makers of using misleading marketing and aggressive lobbying tactics to sell their products in an article in *The Lancet* medical journal. According to the article manufacturers in the \$55-bn-a-year industry make unsubstantiated claims about their products, such as that they are very similar to actual breast milk. "The authors said new products, such as hypoallergenic or organic formulas, are also sometimes marketed with the implication that they have unique benefits and are sold at premium prices. Concerns about the global industry's outreach, particularly in developing countries, go back to the late 1970s when women were discouraged from breastfeeding their children, denying them key health benefits needed in childhood," reported **Bloomberg** (8 February 2023). Nestle SA, Abbott, Reckitt Benckiser Group, Danone SA, China Feihe Ltd and Dutch dairy cooperative Royal FrieslandCampina are among the biggest infant formula makers. None of the companies was directly accused of unethical marketing or lobbying by the international coalition of researchers.

### **GSK licenses cheap copies of HIV**

Reuters reported on 30 March that British drugmaker GSK has signed deals with three companies allowing them to make inexpensive generic versions of its long-acting HIV preventive medicine for use in lower-income countries. According to the drugmaker's HIV treatment division, ViiV Healthcare, it had issued voluntary licenses - waiving intellectual property rights - to Aurobindo Pharma, Cipla and Viatrix, which will manufacture the generic versions of cabotegravir. The generics will be supplied in 90 countries, subject to regulatory approvals. Indian drugmaker Cipla will make the injections in India and has plans to manufacture in South Africa.

### **Pharma industry pushes for a licence to make generic HIV injection**

Stravos Nicolaou, chair of Pharmaceuticals Made in SA (Pharmisa), said the dearth of African pharmaceutical manufacturers in the deal recently announced by the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) was at odds with policies flouted by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar) and the vaccine alliance Gavi emphasising the strategic importance of strengthening Africa's pharmaceutical manufacturing industry. - **Business Day** (3 April 2023). The MPP signed sub-licences with Indian generic manufacturers Cipla, Aurobindo and Viatrix subsidiary Mylan. Nicolaou questioned the fact that there is not one African manufacturer among them and said African manufacturers find it challenging to get licences from them. "Only four African companies are among the dozens of pharmaceutical manufacturers awarded sub-licences flowing from the agreements signed by the MPP with 18 patent holders on products for HIV, TB, malaria, cancer and Covid-19. Three of these companies are South African: Adcock Ingram, which has licences for nine HIV Africa's biggest generic drug manufacturer, SA-based Aspen Pharmacare, has previously secured voluntary licences directly from patent holders."

### **WHO launches mRNA vaccine hub in Cape Town**

**Business Day** reported on 21 April that the World Health Organization (WHO) has inaugurated its mRNA vaccine technology hub in Cape Town. "WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

and senior health officials will visit the hub for five days, discussing the programme's sustainability, mRNA technology, and its potential use in combating other diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, which disproportionately affect low-income countries. "Global pharmaceutical firms, including Pfizer and Moderna, declined to provide the technical know-how to replicate their vaccines, primarily due to intellectual property concerns, prompting the hub to pursue the vaccine independently."

### **Cancer vaccines poised to unlock 'new treatment paradigm'**

"Moderna and Merck & Co reported that adding an experimental mRNA-based vaccine reduced the risk that the most deadly skin cancer would spread by 65% over treatment with immunotherapy alone," reported *Reuters* (5 June 2023). The previous data indicated that this customised mRNA vaccine, combined with Merck's Keytruda, reduced the risk of recurrence or death from melanoma by 44% compared to using Keytruda alone. This study contributes to the mounting evidence that supports the use of mRNA technology in creating personalised vaccines."

### **Global study finds antibiotic-resistant bugs claim over 200 000 infants annually**

According to a recent global observational study, NeoOBS, published in *Plos Medicine*, antibiotic resistance in treating sepsis among neonates (babies within 60 days of birth), caused up to 214 000 deaths yearly. – (*Spotlight*, 9 June 2023).

"This has led to doctors resorting to last-line antibiotics like carbapenems due to the high degree of antibiotic resistance. Several factors contribute to the spread of infections in hospital settings, including staff shortages, lack of space, overcrowding, and poor infection control.

"A new sepsis trial, NeoSep 1, is underway in Kenya and South Africa to compare the safety and efficacy of three new combinations of older antibiotics. The NeoOBS study has led to the development of two tools to aid in treating neonatal sepsis: the NeoSep Severity Score and the NeoSep Recovery Score. These tools are expected to prevent excessive and inappropriate antibiotic use, which compounds antibiotic resistance globally."