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Sanofi, PATH deliver anti-malaria drug made from semisynthetic derivative

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Singapore: Global pharmaceutical firm, Sanofi, and world organization, PATH, have initated the delivery of the first large scale batches of antimalarial treatments manufactured with a new semisynthetic artemisinin derivative to malaria endemic countries in Africa.

By complementing botanically-derived supplies, the new option can widen access to treatment for millions sickened by malaria every year.

"This shipment represents a critical step in improving access to effective treatments and combatting malaria in some of the most affected countries in the world," said Dr Robert Sebbag, vice president, Sanofi's Access to Medicines. "Sanofi is proud that these first batches of antimalarial medicines produced with semisynthetic artemisinin derivative are on the way to reaching patients. This milestone is the result of the enduring partnership between PATH and Sanofi that has translated years of effort into lifesaving change."

Both artesunate, the active ingredient produced from semisynthetic artemisinin, and semisynthetic artemisinin itself, have been shown to be identical to those derived from botanical sources. Consequently, there are no changes to the quality of ASAQ Winthrop.

"Semisynthetic artemisinin demonstrates how public-private partnerships, tenacity, and an urgent and shared goal - saving children's lives - can drive promising innovations to transformative global scale,"says Steve Davis, President and CEO of PATH.

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"As we work together toward a world free of malaria, we are thrilled to see this cutting-edge technology reach the people whose lives it can save. We are proud to join Sanofi and our partners in celebrating this achievement."

Artemisinin is a key ingredient in artemisinin-based combination therapies, recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the first-line treatment for infection with the most deadly form of malaria. The existing botanical supply of artemisinin, derived from the sweet
wormwood plant, is volatile due to a number of factors, resulting in inconsistent price and periodic shortages.

Sources of high-quality artemisinin can strengthen the artemisinin supply chain, stabilizepricing, and ensure greater availability of treatment to people suffering from malaria.

Last year, PATH and Sanofi launched commercial production of semisynthetic artemisinin at Sanofi's Garessio site in Italy. In May 2013, the WHO's Prequalification of Medicines Programme announced the acceptability of semisynthetic artemisinin produced by Sanofi for use in the manufacture of artemisinin-derived active substances.

In the future, sustained production of semisynthetic artemisinin can help scale up global efforts to combat malaria. Sanofi currently has the capacity to produce 50 to 60 metric tons annually, which corresponds to a third of the global annual need for artemisinin and translates to up to 125 million lifesaving treatments.

The partnership for semisynthetic artemisinin is led by PATH's Drug Development program, and is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project began in 2004, and partners include Sanofi, the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), and Amyris. The novel use of synthetic biology technology is based on pioneering inventions from the UC Berkeley, Amyris, the National Research Council Canada Plant Biotechnology Institute, and GenoClipp Biotechnology BV.