Health Technology Assessment (HTA):
A definition, objectives and integration into decision making
A 2-day seminar in Hanoi, Vietnam – 10/11 April 2017

Seminar Report
ATTENDANCE

Overall, 64 people (including speakers) participated during the seminar.

The seminar was held under the umbrella of the Vietnam Social Security (VSS), including the presence of Deputy Director General Dr Minh Thao at VSS. Senior officials from the central VSS organization and from provinces were also invited to attend, as well as officials from the Ministry of Health. The academic programme was organised by the ESSEC Institute of Health Economics and Management, supported by the Institute’s corporate and industry association partners. The French Industry Association LEEM, which has a specific interest in Vietnam, was also a partner for the event, represented by Mr Jean-Daniel Ruiz. Dr Alain Dorié, Attaché for Health at the French Embassy attended the opening session; the seminar was closed by Mr Minh, Director for Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices at VSS.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

The broad aim of the seminar was to provide Vietnam Social Security (VSS) and Ministry of Health (MoH) senior executives with a practical framework for HTA, based on precise definition and standard methods. The expected outcome was to define the need for further cooperation in the field of HTA, and to explore how the dialogue between authorities and companies can be facilitated in this field, should it be developed further in Vietnam.

The overall concept of HTA was presented as an introduction. Benchmarks from Europe were presented:

- The French National Health Authority (Haute Autorité de Santé - HAS) France, with the presentation of the whole scope of missions of the Haute Autorité de Santé, and a focus on HTA, including production of clinical guidelines;
- The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) England and Wales, similarly.
Methods for technology assessment – clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness, appraisals and implications were also presented.

Participants were invited to work on one of three case studies designed to simulate development of the scope of a “full” HTA: The case studies were based on:

- A public health program for cervical cancer screening;
- A pharmaceutical intervention, exenatide, for treating chronic type-2 diabetes;
- A medical device, drug eluting stents, used in cardiovascular disease.

Update on the status of HTA in Vietnam was also communicated to participants, thanks to the presentations from the Health Strategy and Policy Institute of Ministry of Health, and from University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City.

SPEAKERS
- Prof Agnès Buzyn, Chairwoman of the Haute Autorité de Santé – France.
- Dr Nguyen Khanh Phuong, Dean Health Economics Faculty, Health Strategy and Policy Institute – Ministry of Health.
- Dr Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy, Faculty of Pharmacy – HCMC University of Medicine and Pharmacy.
- Mrs Annie Chicoye – Executive Director, Institute of Health Economics and Management, ESSEC Business School.
- Mr Joe Caputo – Associate Director of the Health Economics and Management Institute Asia Pacific, ESSEC Business School.

KEY POINTS

Through the seminar and subsequent debrief with VSS, a number of issues emerged, from both a policy and technical perspective:

- **HTA concepts and initiatives are expanding in Vietnam:**
  - MOH with VSS have launched a pilot project since Jan 2016 in cooperation with the International Unit\(^1\) of HTAP, the HTA agency formed in 2007 in Thailand. The project is managed by Dr Phuong of the Health Strategy and Policy Institute (HSPI) of the Ministry of Health; Dr Phuong was a guest speaker at the seminar, providing participants with information regarding the pilot outcomes;
  - Dr Margaret Chang, director-general of WHO, visiting Vietnam on 10\(^{th}\) of April, explicitly recommended the Vietnam government to implement an independent agency;
  - The 6\(^{th}\) HTAsialink conference is being held in Hanoi 18-20 April 2017, hosted by the HSPI [http://htasialink.org](http://htasialink.org); this event is restricted to regional HTA agencies only, and not open to private companies or groups funded by Industry; the HTAsialink network was founded in Jan 2011 by NECA (Korea), HITAP (Thailand)

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\(^1\) Since 2013, the HITAP International Unit (HIU) has supported low- and middle-income country governments and international organizations for country capacity building and Health Technology Assessment (HTA).
and CDE (Taiwan); it subsequently expanded to include additional national agencies, including NICE – the only non-Asian member.

- There are many technical hurdles to overcome in order to implement HTA in Vietnam:
  o Information gaps (clinical data, epidemiology, resource use, current practice etc.) – existing information systems are only partial, not consistent, not of good quality and not shared between MOH and VSS;
  o Lack of expertise and resources – training of experts perceived as highly needed, including potential for training abroad; no dedicated funding so far;
  o Lack of guidelines – considered in so far as this will be a primary requirement for conducting cost/clinical effectiveness assessments in a robust manner.

- Implications of HTA and its role in decision making in a public coverage setting need to be fully understood:
  o Similarly to other middle income markets, HTA is perceived more as a cost containment tool, rather than a tool to improve the quality of care, eventually generating higher expenditure for Social Security (e.g. chronic disease management), as was the case presented by Prof Buzyn;
  o The requirement of a structured framework addressing the different dimensions of HTA, in particular the importance of medical guidelines and implementation of good clinical practices; current MOH focus appears to be on cost/clinical effectiveness analysis and is not fully aware of its limitation in informing decision making;
  o So far, the view appears to be that HTA should be conducted by MOH, with eventual VSS support; involvement of other stakeholders, such as physicians, in the design of clinical practice guidelines and key factors for gaining their adherence to implement them is not yet being considered;
  o There is limited awareness about the importance of which perspective to adopt for technology assessment; perspective is so far limited to the public payer (Social Security) whereas it is acknowledged that out-of-pocket expenses for patients and families are also an important consideration in Vietnam; involvement of patients – with no structured representation thus far – has not yet been considered; how to do so raised a lot of questions from the audience;
  o There has been little dialogue about what the involvement of pharma & medical devices companies in the assessment process could be. Prof Buzyn commented “you cannot expect to run HTA all by yourselves; a lot of information comes from the companies themselves”. The possibility of setting up agreements with companies to manage efficient utilization of pharmaceuticals in line with HTA outcomes seemed to be an approach not yet really considered.

- Overall, participants seem to agree that Vietnam has not yet established its national framework for running HTA in a consistent, transparent and useful way to expand quality of care, access and control of expenses covered by the Social Security:
  o All participants agreed that a law setting out the principles of HTA is necessary in order to implement HTA into the healthcare system, but members of parliament
and government top officials may not be fully aware of the technical and policy implications for the time being;

- There is, therefore, some divergence in the timing by which such a legal framework could be adopted: should a law be passed before a proper framework is designed or, on the contrary, should there be a voluntary and more experimental pilot period (as in Japan) in order to improve knowledge, develop expertise and set up methodologies and processes before adoption by law?

The participation of Pharma Group and several representatives of the ESSEC Institute’s sponsoring companies in the seminar was an opportunity for the industry to learn about the on-going initiatives from MOH and VSS in Vietnam.

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