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Baltimore, Maryland, USA, March 1, 2017: The Global Virus Network (GVN), representing 38 Centers of Excellence and six affiliates in 25 countries and comprising foremost experts in every class of virus causing disease in humans, was awarded \$148,000 by Gilead Sciences, Inc. to develop and implement a sustainable program for testing, treating and linking to care hard to reach patient populations in India. The announcement was made today by Robert C. Gallo, MD, Co-Founder, Scientific Director, GVN, The Homer and Martha Gudelsky Distinguished Professor in Medicine, Director, Institute of Human Virology (IHV) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, a GVN Center of Excellence, and Shyamasundaran Kottilil, MBBS, PhD, who will lead this study and is Professor of Medicine, Co-Director, Clinical Research Unit, Associate Director for Clinical Research, IHV.

“We are grateful to Gilead for their continued leadership in, among other efforts, making medication and affordable healthcare a priority around the world, and in this particular case with escalation of novel hepatitis C virus treatment in India,” said Dr. Robert Gallo, who is renowned for his co-discovery of HIV as the cause of AIDS and development of the HIV blood test. “Dr. Kottilil is a leader in the field who can take on challenging variables and successfully bring effective, sustainable healthcare and treatment models to low resource communities around the globe.”

The proposed study utilizes a model of building local capacity through high-level clinical mentoring to 80 physicians who are then responsible for mentoring more than 500 healthcare workers throughout the country to significantly decrease HCV prevalence. The project focuses on building specific training for specialized populations including patients with injection drug use and community clinic patients as well as considerations in varying settings such as urban versus rural.

“The purpose of this program is to develop an HCV training model for medical providers in India that can be duplicated and applied to other areas within South Asia,” said Dr. Kottilil. “Generic medications for the treatment of hepatitis C are already available and approved to use in India.”

“We are pleased to support the Global Virus Network, an organization that shares our goal of addressing the world’s biggest health challenges,” said Gregg Alton, Executive Vice President, Corporate and Medical Affairs. “In India, the majority of the population lives in rural areas where hepatitis screening is limited. This initiative will support education efforts that will help increase routine hepatitis C screening, which is essential to slowing and ultimately ending the epidemic in India.”

In the past couple of years, oral, interferon-free, direct-acting agents (DAAs) have emerged resulting in an effective HCV cure. At this time, only a few providers worldwide have experience in the management of HCV with interferon/ribavirin, and there are no infectious disease specialists in India with experience using the DAAs.

“Despite high HCV disease burden in many parts of Asia, no studies exist, to date documenting diagnostic and treatment outcomes of DAAs such as sofosbuvir in a real-world context in this region said Dr. Kottlil. “We are pleased to partner with our colleagues in India to accelerate HCV care continuum. On paper, we can rid the world of HCV but to do so, we must innovate proven, effective community driven outreach models that educate, test, treat and link to care the most vulnerable populations like those we are reaching through this grant.”