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Saving Lives with SMS for Life

IBM, Novartis and Vodafone Join Forces to Help Halt Malaria in Africa

LONDON, Dec. 14

/PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- A new

solution developed by IBM

(NYSE: [IBM](#)), Novartis and

Vodafone with the Roll Back

Malaria Partnership, is helping to

save lives using everyday technology to improve the availability of anti-malarial drugs in remote areas of Tanzania.



(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20091214/NY25146-a>)

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20091214/NY25146-b>)

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Called "SMS for Life," the initiative uses a combination of mobile phones, SMS (Short Messaging Service) technologies and intuitive web sites to track and manage the supply of Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) drugs and Quinine injectables, both of which are key to reducing the number of deaths from malaria.

The mosquito-borne disease causes nearly one million deaths in Africa each year, mostly among pregnant women and young children, and many people die because they simply lack quick access to vital medication.

The concept of using text messaging to improve stock management of life-saving medicines was developed by pharmaceutical company Novartis and a team of international students taking part in IBM's internship program, Extreme Blue. The team came up with SMS for Life, as it relies on simple technology and fosters self-sufficiency. IBM was tasked with managing the overall project and Vodafone was invited to develop and manage a system based on simple SMS messaging that would help ensure dispensaries did not run out of vital stock.

After visits to clinics, hospitals and dispensaries across Tanzania, IBM, Novartis and Vodafone initiated a five-month pilot of the SMS for Life solution, covering 135 villages and over a million people in different

geographic locations across Tanzania.

Vodafone, together with its technology partner MatsSoft, developed a system in which healthcare staff at each facility receives automated SMS messages, which prompt them to check the remaining stock of anti-malarial drugs each week. Using toll-free numbers, staff reply with an SMS to a central database system hosted in the United Kingdom, providing details of stock levels, and deliveries can be made before supplies run out at local health centres.

"This is an example of a truly innovative solution helping solve a humanitarian problem," says Peter Ward of IBM, SMS for Life Project Manager. "After spending time on the ground, we created a project plan, developed the application with Vodafone and Novartis and established the best way to deliver the pilot, working with the Tanzanian Ministry of Health. We expect other countries will also be able to benefit in the future."

"Vodafone has worked closely with IBM, Novartis and MatsSoft, to develop a simple, robust and innovative system that is able to deliver even in the most remote African communities," said Dr. Dianne Sullivan, Scientific Adviser, Mobile Health, of Vodafone. "The SMS for Life solution shows the tremendous potential of mobile technology to deliver social good through lateral thinking by helping to ensure supplies of life-saving drugs."

During the first few weeks of the pilot, the number of health facilities with stock-outs in one district alone, was reduced by over 75 percent. The early success of the SMS for Life pilot project has the Tanzanian authorities interested in implementing the solution across the rest of the country. Tanzania has around 5,000 clinics, hospitals and dispensaries, but at any one time, as many as half could potentially be out of stock of anti-malarial drugs.

"The SMS for Life program has already had a positive effect in Tanzania," says Senior Health Officer with Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Tanzania, Winfred Mwafongo. "I've seen district medical officers ordering urgent stock replacements for various health facilities. During a visit to 19 rural health facilities in one district alone, I saw huge improvements in their inventory management systems. I'm very impressed with the results so far and look forward to following the rest of the pilot through to completion."

"Collaboration is critical to tackle health problems of the developing world, and we are proud to be part of the SMS for Life partnership, a project that will reduce stock-outs, and ensure that mothers and their young children in Africa have access to life-saving anti-malarial medicines," says Silvio Gabriel, Executive Vice President and Head of the Malaria Initiatives at Novartis.

Designed as a public and private partnership leveraging the skills and resources of several companies, SMS for Life could have far-reaching implications for existing health systems worldwide. Several other African states are already keen to introduce the project.

About the RBM Global Partnership

The RBM Partnership is the global coordinator of the fight against malaria. RBM draws its strength and experience from [hundreds of partners](#) from [malaria endemic countries](#), country donors, companies, non-governmental and community organisations, foundations and research and academic institutions. RBM partners' collective aim is to reduce annual malaria deaths from around one million to virtually zero by 2015 through the implementation of the [Global Malaria Action Plan \(GMAP\)](#). This outlines RBM's vision for a substantial and sustained reduction in the burden of malaria in the near and mid-term, and the eventual global eradication of malaria in the long term with the introduction of new tools. www.rollbackmalaria.org

About IBM

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About Novartis

Novartis provides healthcare solutions that address the evolving needs of patients and societies. Focused solely on healthcare, Novartis offers a diversified portfolio to best meet these needs: innovative medicines, cost-saving generic pharmaceuticals, preventive vaccines, diagnostic tools and consumer health products. Novartis is the only company with leading positions in each of these areas. In 2008, the Group's continuing operations achieved net sales of USD 41.5 billion and net income of USD 8.2 billion. Approximately USD 7.2 billion was invested in R&D activities throughout the Group. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ approximately 99,000 full-time-equivalent associates and operate in more than 140 countries around the world. For more information, please visit <http://www.novartis.com>.

About Vodafone

Vodafone is the world's leading international mobile communications group with approximately 323 million proportionate customers as at 30 September 2009. Vodafone currently has equity interests in 31 countries across five continents and around 40 partner networks worldwide. For more information, please visit www.vodafone.com

Contact:

IBM

Arlene Wainstein

Tel: 33 155916172

arlenewainstein@fr.ibm.com

IBM

Mike Azzi

914-766-1561

azzi@us.ibm.com

Vodafone Group Media Relations

Tel: +44 (0)1635 664 444

Email: groupmediarelations@vodafone.com

Novartis Media Relations

Sarah Coles

Ruder Finn

Office: +1 212 593 6393

Mobile: +1 646 354 8697

Email: coless@runderfinn.com

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