

Official Launch of the WHO Call for Innovative Technologies

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Health technologies in the form of medical devices are indispensable for delivering healthcare at all levels. Yet access to, appropriate and affordable health technologies in low- and middle- income countries is still insufficient.

In 2006, the United States, the European Union and Japan each spent about 300 US\$ respectively on medical equipment. In the rest of the world, the average of such expenditure was only in the order of US\$ 6 per capita, - and in sub-Saharan Africa it was US\$ 2.5 per capita¹ or about 1% of that of USA, Europe and Japan.

Yet when the poor countries invest their few dollars in health technologies, what do they get? Well sometimes they just lose the money. Sometimes they just happen to invest in obsolete technologies rather than adopting better new solutions.

Sometimes they invest in technologies that are introduced as innovative and promising only to discover that these technologies a few years down the line have not been able to establish themselves on the market and have disappeared again because too few have been aware of the solution they offered.

When this happens the investment is truly lost and unfortunately, it does happen even when those technologies did in fact offer genuine innovative solutions.

The world needs a mechanism to promote that good innovative concepts are given a chance to find themselves a niche in the poor and middle income countries at least to the extent that countries be made aware of their existence.

The purpose of this call is to suggest such a mechanism.

But let me also state very clearly from the outset that the purpose of the call is not to promote singular commercial brands.

WHO cannot promote any one single product, but rather the concepts that express the innovative approach.

It is the innovative concepts that we want to acknowledge and promote, - concepts which are suitable for low- and middle-income countries, like lower price , less need of spare parts, improved accessibility and effective diagnosis at point of care for example.

¹ World Health Report 2008 Primary Health Care Now More Than Ever.

It is also adaptations to already existing technologies that provide new solutions which can be more cost effective, cheaper solutions, simpler and even more robust solutions.

With the call we want to invite universities, companies and professionals that have innovative ideas or products to describe the concept to WHO and to explain how developing countries might benefit from adopting the concept.

If the proposal is selected, the innovative concept will be posted on the WHO website and the information will be shared with governments, procurement officers, donors and other stakeholders, with a view to generally fostering the development, availability of, and access to, innovative health technologies, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Yet again, individual companies and brands will not be mentioned and in the event that a concept is acknowledged and companies cannot make use of the name of WHO (without express permission) to market products.

However, by highlighting concepts for appropriate technologies for developing economies, governments might more effectively select and use appropriate solutions, thereby focusing on a market that perhaps then will be more conscious of the needs of developing countries than is the case today.

In this call - as in other contexts - WHO values its collaboration with the International Union for Physical and Engineering Sciences in Medicine (IUPESM), with the International Federation of Medical and Biological Engineering which is in official NGO relations with WHO and the International Organizations for Medical Physics .

Our organizations have a common interest which is health technologies, in particular medical devices which are indispensable in health care delivery, as tools for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation.

I thus greatly appreciate this opportunity to launch the call in association with the World Congress of the IUPESM.

I am pleased to hereby declare the call for innovative technologies open,
-and I hope that you will join us in our commitment to make available appropriate health technologies in order to respond to the health care needs of the world
- it is only through the efforts of all, through partnerships and cooperation that we can effect change
- please join the call, spread the word and make it happen.

Thank you.