

International Association for Business and Health (IABH)
Ann Sullivan

Summary

The International Association for Business and Health is a nonprofit advocacy group based in Washington, D.C. The Association's President, Ann Sullivan, well known in America for her work on business and women's issues, spearheaded this initiative together with a distinguished group of advisers and board members from both the business and health care communities.

Foremost among the threats to the future of health care is the various efforts to curtail or even eliminate patent rights. Seizing drug formulas to reproduce at-will may seem like a tempting short cut to some policy makers and advocates. Unfortunately for the desperately impoverished peoples of the world, many policy makers – even within the health care community itself - lack understanding about how patent rights impact patients.

Entrepreneurs are not the adversaries of people in need. In fact, entrepreneurs are a crucial prerequisite in advancing the quality and availability of health care to people worldwide. Property right protection is the key to protecting the fruits of a person's labor, sparks the incentive to innovate, and produces a healthy, prosperous community. In short, property rights form the very foundation of a civil society. In the modern worldwide economy, intellectual property is, arguably, even more important to businesses and consumers than physical property.

Under the current patent system, companies engaged in pharmaceutical research and manufacturing have produced medicines to treat a wide variety of illnesses. That is no abstract theory about how to save human lives – it is happening now, in the real world. But before the first tablet or injection is given to a patient waiting for relief, an average of \$800 million has been spent in research and development, according to a 2003 study published in *The Journal of Health Economics*, to make certain that the compound will do its job and do it safely and effectively. But unless hard work is rewarded, innovation protected, and health care systems (as well as business and agriculture) allowed to flourish, economic development languishes, education falters, and public health inevitably is placed at risk.

The WHO can play a pivotal role in helping the peoples of the world have better, more affordable access to life-saving drugs. There are activists who call for a Robin Hood approach: simply seize drug formulas and reproduce them to help the needy. Surely this cannot be a viable, long-term strategy for meeting health care needs.

As the WHO considers a global strategy and plan of action, it should give strong weight to the market system that has produced the life-saving drugs that so many people depend upon. We believe circumventing the patent system is a short sighted approach. What is needed is a strong business community that will produce long term, lasting improvements to the health care system in countries that have been waiting for this to happen.