



Healthcare evolves with Alliances & Leadership

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H.E.A.L. is a global organization dedicated to quality healthcare in the underserved regions of Latin America. Its membership is located in the Central and South American countries of Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Salvador, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay and Argentina. Its home office is located in the USA. Our focus is not only on infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, but also on the increasing appearance of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, asthma and chronic lung disease in underdeveloped countries along with methods in which we can enhance the disease control policies in the regions we serve.

There are various issues in the recent IGWG report which cause concern. One concern is the statement that responsibility for implementation of the strategy should “rest with a range of actors including... national institutions, development partners, academia, pharmaceutical companies, public-private partnerships, charitable foundations and nongovernmental organizations.” (A/PHI/IGWG/2/2 Pge 12) Although the report lists numerous “actors” who should be involved with medication development, it is well known that the main “actor” involved in new medication innovations is the pharmaceutical industry. It is equally important to recognise that the organizations opposing the preservation of Intellectual Property include generic manufacturers and affiliated institutions and that these entities have done little if anything in the development of new drugs.

Placing the burden of drug cost solely on Intellectual Property and patents is not only unfair it is also unrealistic. Developing countries must also bear responsibility in the cost of drugs. Patient access to medications is a complex issue in which the poverty of the individual indeed plays a role but the absence of state financial health care, costly infrastructure of healthcare, lack of organization of medical personnel and in many cases a government’s imposition of taxes and mark ups of tariffs over the medication cost also serve to make drugs unaffordable.

It is essential to consider that the arguments contained in the IGWG report against intellectual properties were influenced by other motivations. The Correa report was supported by countries and parties involved in the making and distribution of generic medications and therefore shows little respect for intellectual properties. Recommendations for removing or limiting Intellectual Property protection will only serve to produce substandard medications and halt the much needed research and development of reliable and safe medications needed to treat diseases now and in the future. In addition, it should also be noted that Intellectual Property protection has actually stimulated development as well as promoted stability in countries as seen in Singapore and India. Protection of intellectual property leads to increased foreign investment. Investment in the pharmaceutical industry leads to drug innovation which ultimately leads to good medical care.

While the desire to insure the availability of medications worldwide is noble, the quality of health care should not be sacrificed. The actions of Brazil and Thailand regarding intellectual property did not solve drug access issues but instead resulted in an increase in drug resistance for HIV/AIDS patients thus adding to the cost of treating this disease. Mass production of an inferior cough medicine in Central America resulted in over 300 deaths. When dealing with the complicated issues of public health, neither the quality of patient care nor the stimulus for innovation should be ignored. Quality of care can only be safeguarded and innovation can only be stimulated if Intellectual Property rights are respected and protected.

Very truly yours,

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