

GM News on global health

IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON HEALTH

Summary of the statement by WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan, 12 November 2008: “The current financial crisis comes at a time when commitment to global health has never been higher. It is not yet clear what the crisis will mean for low-income and emerging economies, but many predictions are highly pessimistic. It is essential to counter this period of economic downturn by increasing investment in health and the social sector. There are several strong reasons supporting this line of action. Inevitably, it is the most vulnerable who suffer the most; the poor, the marginalized, children, women, disabled, the elderly, and those with chronic illness. Second, investment in the social sectors is investment in human capital.

Healthy human capital is the foundation of economic productivity and can accelerate recovery towards economic stability. Third, equitable distribution of health care is a critical contributor to social cohesion. Social cohesion is the best protection against social unrest, nationally and internationally. Lastly, robust health systems are essential to maintain surveillance and response capacity in the face of pandemic threats.

I am calling on all governments and political leaders to maintain their efforts to strengthen and improve the performance of their health systems, to protect the health of the people of the world, and in particular of those most fragile, in face of the present financial and economic crisis.”



OBAMA & GLOBAL HEALTH

President-elect of America, Barack Obama, pledges to double US aid for promoting global health by 2012. He plans extra investments of \$1 billion over five years to fight HIV/AIDS in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe and supports the rights of sovereign nations to access quality-assured low-cost generic medication to meet their pressing public health needs. He also pledges to increase funding for better sanitation and universal primary education.

Critics question the (financial) feasibility of Obama’s plans. Also, the strong HIV/AIDS focus is disapproved of and global health advocates urge the US government to widen the focus.

2009 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF HUMAN RIGHTS LEARNING

On 10 December 2008, the International Year of Human Rights Learning sets off, to be devoted to activities to broaden and deepen human rights learning. It aims to enhance the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

FIRM INTRODUCES FLAVOURED ANTI-MALARIA DRUG

In Nigeria a special tasty flavoured drug is introduced: Actimax®. It is a combination of antimalarial Artemether and Lumefantrine and is available in the flavours banana, orange and raspberry.

NO OBLIGED CONSENT LEADS TO MORE HIV TESTING IN HIGH RISK GROUPS

Populations at highest risk for HIV infection face multiple barriers to HIV testing. A hospital in San Francisco eliminated the required written patient consent for testing and the amount of tests increased with 67%, especially among males, homeless and uninsured patients. More people were diagnosed HIV+ than before the policy change.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: NOW MORE THAN EVER

The 2008 World Health Report focuses on primary health care. “Globalization is putting the social cohesion of many countries under stress, and health systems are clearly not performing as well as they could and as they should. Health systems need to respond better and faster to the challenges of a changing world. Primary Health Care can do that.”

Download the full report at <http://www.who.int/whr/2008/en/index.html>.



DEVELOPMENT IN RESEARCH ON MYCOBACTERIUM ULCERANS

Mycobacterium ulcerans infection, or Buruli ulcer, is the third most common human mycobacteriosis worldwide. Buruli ulcer is a devastating, necrotizing disease, with a huge social impact. The disease is present in impoverished, humid, tropical, rural areas of Africa, even more frequently than TB and leprosy in some regions. Besides being a disease of the poor, Buruli ulcer is a poverty promoting chronic infectious disease.

Portaels et al. have now isolated *M. ulcerans* from an aquatic insect in Benin, and proved that this insect transmits the pathogen to humans. This finding will have positive consequences for the control of this neglected tropical disease.

CONDOM USE DEPENDENT ON AGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARTNERS

Researchers investigated condom use among adolescents in four African countries. They found that only 20-45% of the adolescents are using a condom, most often in Ghana, the least in Malawi. Age difference between partners is a major determinant of consistent use of condoms: young men with a 0-4 years younger partner are about 2.5 times more likely to use condoms than those with an age difference of 5-9 years. Other important predictors of consistent condom use are residence, education & exposure to condom demonstration and exposure to media. The authors conclude that education programmes on healthy sexual behaviour are definitely effective in these countries.

References

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