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Special Conference 2 on International Cooperation

Facilitating international disease research



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Introduction

Disease is a growing and ever-changing problem, it is essential that the knowledge and information available on this is up to date and thorough. Researching patients, medications, patterns and symptoms is of high importance for an international healthy society. International organizations play a large role in supplying countries with information on diseases going round, for example the World Health Organization (WHO). Knowledge has proven to be one the driving power for minimizing the effects of global epidemics such as Ebola, but also recurring diseases as cancer.

Numerous organizations are collaborating with nation states to decrease the global disparity in health research, known as the 10/90 gap. This gap refers to the minimal focus of most health care systems on only 90% of the diseases in the world, meaning there is a large variety of diseases that are not covered by research, mostly in LEDCs.

There are multiple challenges that these collaborations face, mostly based on a lack of financing and intellectual resources. These are just two examples of factors that play a role in the facilitation of disease research, this is broadened when focused on an international level. ¹

“Resource is creating knew knowledge,” every day with the new knowledge we create through research, we come a step closer to finding a cure to cancer, a preventative method for HIV/AIDS spread and a control for malaria. It is the UN and the WHO’s role to coordinate the cooperation of nations on finding the resources to facilitate and standardize the research of diseases.

Definition of Key Terms

¹ "Unite For Sight." *The Importance of Global Health Research*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <<http://www.uniteforsight.org/global-health-university/research-importance>>.



Global 10/90 Gap

The global 10/90 gap claims that less than 10% of global health research is directed at 90% of the global disease burden. Hence, it is argued that majority of diseases in developing countries has been neglected, and minimal attention is devoted to this.²

Neglected Diseases

Neglected diseases are those that are often not covered in researching, and have little knowledge and information available based on them. Majority of the time, these are tropical diseases that occur in developing nations.

Research and Development (R&D)

The general term used to describe the investments that countries and organizations make in prioritizing knowledge and innovations based on research and development.

Global burden of disease

The global burden of disease is the combined burden produced by all diseases globally. It assesses mortality and disability from major diseases, injuries and risk factors.³

Inherently global health issues

These are factors that have a circular effect on the cause and consequences of disease, related to the economic, social, environmental and political status of the surroundings.⁴

General Overview

As mentioned previously, there are many different aspects and factors that affect the international collaboration on providing for disease research, which covers all diseases, including neglected diseases.

Factors affecting disease

² Stevens, Philip. "Diseases of Poverty and the 10/90 Gap." (2004): n. pag. Nov. 2004. Web. 5 July 2015. <<http://www.who.int/intellectualproperty/submissions/InternationalPolicyNetwork.pdf>>.

³ *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_burden_of_disease>.

⁴ Labonte, Ronald, and Jerry Spiegel. "Setting Global Health Research Priorities : Burden of Disease and Inherently Global Health Issues Should Both Be Considered." *BMJ : British Medical Journal*. BMJ Publishing Group Ltd, n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1125637/>>.



Health, disease and healthcare systems are all focused on several factors, having a circular effect of consequence and cause. These factors are political, social, economic and environmental. Our shrinking world and increasing globalization has caused for these factors to no longer be applicable on a national level but also on an international level. A disease is formed by its surroundings, and spreads and grows through its surroundings, hence factors such as sustainability, gender roles, economic stability and health care system all effect the formation and growth of disease.⁵

In depth and thorough research is required to investigate the links between these aspects and the disease, and how health care reforms and management strategies can affect the health status of the area. The most prevalent issues have found to be in developing countries, in relation to gender issues, water shortages, poverty, war and conflict.

Research standards

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the responsible organization for coordinating and directing international health for the United Nations. Part of this is research for disease, its effects, origins and consequences. There are four main goals on which the health research done by the WHO are based;

1. *“Capacity – build capacity to strengthen health research systems,*
2. *Priorities – support the setting of research priorities that meet health needs particularly in low and middle income countries,*
3. *Standards – develop an enabling environment for research through the creation of norms and standards for good research practice,*
4. *Translation – ensure quality evidence I turned into affordable health technologies and evidence informed policy.”⁶*

Instances requiring research

There are different instances which call for research on disease, this is in structural cases, in continuous cases or in incident cases. Structural research should be conducted for investigating different patterns, this should occur within an international cooperation of organizations and countries. Incident cases are generally epidemic

⁵ Labonte, Ronald, and Jerry Spiegel. "Setting Global Health Research Priorities : Burden of Disease and Inherently Global Health Issues Should Both Be Considered." *BMJ : British Medical Journal*. BMJ Publishing Group Ltd, n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1125637/>>.

⁶ "Research." *WHO*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 July 2015. <<http://www.who.int/topics/research/en/>>.



outbreaks which require immediate attention, and hence research to find the best method of approach, the origin and how to prevent further spread, an example being the Ebola outbreak recently. The continuous cases are diseases which are constantly existent and require continued attention, for example cancer types and HIV/AIDs. These are two diseases that have not yet been found to be completely curable, and require research throughout for innovative purposes of finding vaccinations, cures, treatments and prevention methods.

Epidemic research

Epidemics are outbreaks of diseases, generally in one area, that quickly spreads and becomes a large threats to the population of that area. These instances require broad research on the disease, prevention, vaccinations, consequences and post epidemic control as well.

Drug resistance

Drug resistance is one of the world's growing global threat in healthcare. It follows from a change in the microorganism causing the disease (fungi, parasites, bacteria etc.) which cause medications in use to be ineffective. A resistant infection has the potential of spreading like any other disease, and hence is a large threat and cause for large direct and indirect costs. Consistent research on this issue will minimize the effects and chances at a catastrophe developing. ⁷

Intellectual resources – facilitation

The WHO currently works with conferences and ad hoc meetings in which specialists and professionals come together to discuss the regular research required. For priority researches the WHO arranges advisory committees existing of topic specialists and provide given advise and suggestions on the issue for primary involvement and further research. There is currently not a global system set up for broad research on disease, there are separate WHO research groups that focus on specific diseases. Examples of these are Tropical Diseases, Vaccine research and Human Reproduction. With the increasing globalization the world is dealing with currently, it is of essence that there is an umbrella organization or database capable of scheduling, prioritizing, recording and organizing all the research dedicated towards disease on a global scale. ⁸

Financial resources – facilitation

⁷ "Drug Resistance." *WHO*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <http://www.who.int/topics/drug_resistance/en/>.

⁸ "Research." *WHO*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 July 2015. <<http://www.who.int/topics/research/en/>>.



The funding and financial structure of the WHO's research capacities is currently in hands of the World Health Assembly. This is controlled by member states who come together and discuss the advice and research collected by the WHO, as well as pressing issues. There is a continuous income of funding from nations and other organizations for research, and in epidemic instances the fundraising done by companies and organizations is the main income for the research funding. For example with the earthquake in Haiti, the main source of money was from fundraising done with radio stations, companies and organizations.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America

The USA has been one of the leading nations in progressed research in the disease issue. They are main contributors to many fundraising projects, and provide intellectual resources of specialists to nations in need of aid.

World Health Organization

The WHO is the leading organization of research and development on the field of disease and health care. They are the umbrella organization of the world's international cooperation on health standards. Any information related to the standards, method of conduction, financing and resourcing of disease research is guided through them.

Norway

Norway is one of the nations on the highest ranking of health standards, and has based their health care system and reform on solid research based evidence. They are major contributors to analyzing methods of conduction in approaching epidemic situations with research.

World Health Assembly

The World Health Assembly is the controlling committee of the WHO and guides them in financial advice and resource efficiency in research development of disease. Any decisions made regarding the standards of the WHO will go through them, and any relations internationally regarding research shall also be decided by their conferences.



Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2012	The WHO strategy on research for health was established
August 15th, 2013	Last World Health Report
July 10th, 2014	GA meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases
April 4th, 2015	The WHO calls for increased transparency in medical research

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- *Research for health (principles, perspectives and strategies) WHO/RPD/ACHR (HRS)/93. Unpublished – 1993*
- *Casebook on ethical issues in international health research – 2009, Geneva WHO*
- *Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases – 66th session, item 119 of the WHO (WHA 53.14)*

Possible Solutions

Solutions that could be considered when addressing the international facilitation of disease research are the setting of guidelines and standards when researching. These could be constituted in a set of standards that nations or the WHO must apply, in the form of revisiting a previous report on this or creating a new one. These standards would be different from before in the way of addressing the inherently global health issues, hence the factors of the surrounding would also be researched and taken into consideration.

Another option to consider is to issue general structured research patterns required for disease update, focused on the development that could follow for improvements on the global disease status. There are currently no structured appointments made by the WHO or the UN regarding the frequency of these updates, nor are there guidelines as to the speed of research regarding cases of direct need.

The resources required for thorough research in the disease industry are of high importance, and require close and solid international cooperation between organizations and specialists of different countries. The setup of an international treaty or signatory regarding



the cooperation and importance of communication between nations would be an option of deciding on the availability of resources and a country's role in this.

The solutions to this issue are endless, and there are many options that can be considered either specifically or on a broader perspective. It is however not within Model UN standards to address the issue of funding in regards to specific figures of money, or sources of income, due to an unlimited funding the UN has. We would therefore like to request that all delegates do not address the financial resource question specifically in regards to this issue.

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Appendices

Appendix I:

Country health profiles:

<http://www.healthdata.org/results/country-profiles>