



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE

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ASTMH SYMPOSIUM SHOWCASES EFFORTS TO MEET THE NEED FOR NEW MEDICINES TO TREAT INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Product Development Partnerships Help Bridge Innovation Gap for Global Health Products

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21, 2009 – An urgent need for new medicines to treat neglected infectious diseases in the developing world has prompted a growing number of collaborations among academic researchers, non-profit product development partnerships (PDPs), and pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. As noted today in a symposium at the 58th annual meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH), these collaborations are opening up new avenues of access to industry technology, expertise, and capabilities, enabling the harnessing of industry resources for new product innovation.

The need for these collaborations between industry and global health non-profits results from the lack of effective prevention or treatments for many infectious diseases of the developing world. There is a tremendous need for new R&D that could lead to new cures. Despite substantial progress in improving delivery of existing medicines for infectious diseases in the developing world, there are still major gaps in disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment that must be alleviated through development of new medicines.

“Industry/public sector product development collaborations are one of the success stories for the developing world, as biopharmaceutical companies are discovering that investment in global health R&D is consistent with their broader commercial strategies,” observed Dr. Christopher D. Earl, former chief executive officer of BIO Ventures for Global Health, who organized the symposium. “The participants in this symposium highlight how their organizations have made substantial progress in moving unused compounds from companies’ shelves to the laboratory and ultimately to the clinic. By allowing experts access to assets that industry has amassed, these collaborations have spurred the development of new medicines for malaria, tuberculosis, and various parasite-borne diseases.”

The symposium, “Rummaging Through Pharma’s Attic: Taking Advantage of Industry’s Unused Assets to Generate New Products for Infectious Diseases of the Developing World,” featured presentations on the following topics:

- Finding a Diamond in the Rough: Screening Industry’s Libraries Against Tropical Parasites -- James H. McKerrow, University of California, San Francisco
- Raiding the Deep Freeze: The Fexinidazole Story – Robert Don, Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi), Geneva, Switzerland
- Will They Respect You in the Morning: Forging Partnerships with Biotech and Big Pharma -- Jörg J. Möhrle, Medicines for Malaria Venture, Geneva, Switzerland
- Extending a Hand: Eli Lilly’s TB Drug Discovery Partnership -- Gail H. Cassell, Eli Lilly & Co., Indianapolis, IN

The aim of the symposium was to illustrate how industry/public sector collaborations help to bridge what Dr. Earl calls an “innovation gap” for new treatments for infectious diseases of poverty. “Historically, most global health products lacked a profitable market that would justify investing the millions of dollars needed to develop new medicines,” he explained. “Additionally, most biotechnology companies lacked experience with the pathogens that afflict poor populations, and were largely unfamiliar with medical practice and pharmaceutical distribution in the developing world. Those barriers, combined with the perceived lack of incentives and management time to devote to non-core activities, conspired to stifle industry investment in global medicines.”

“That is all changing, as donors such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, federal agencies such the National Institutes of Health and industry itself are supporting product development collaborations,” Dr. Earl continued. “Disease experts are increasingly gaining access to companies’ compound libraries, technology platforms, and shelved products, and the result is greater access to effective medicines among the populations that need them.”

“The story of these product development collaborations is one of pioneering companies and public sector partners creating successful models to the benefit of global health,” said Thomas Wellems, MD, PhD, president of ASTMH. “As the ASTMH is committed to improved global health, we look forward to and actively encourage continued collaborations in this area.”

About the ASTMH

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH), founded in 1903, is a worldwide organization of scientists, clinicians and program professionals whose mission is to promote global health through the prevention and control of infectious and other diseases that disproportionately afflict the global poor.

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