

Abstracts

**Sandosham Memorial Lecture
Keynote Address**

SANDOSHAM MEMORIAL LECTURE

Neglected tropical diseases: hidden successes, emerging opportunities

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Approximately one sixth of the world's population suffer from one or more neglected tropical diseases. Today, neglected tropical diseases are a symptom of poverty and disadvantage. Those most affected are the poorest populations often living in remote, rural areas, urban slums or in conflict zones. With little political voice, neglected tropical diseases have a low profile and status in public health priorities. Nonetheless, impressive progress is being made. Never before have so many of these diseases been targeted for action with time limited goals, typically through the creation of public-private partnerships. Provision of drugs free of charge is a striking feature of such partnerships, with the mobilization of additional resources for country-level activities to make treatment more accessible to patients. During meetings in Berlin and Geneva in 2004 and 2005, WHO with its partners developed a conceptual framework to move away from a purely disease-centred approach to an integrated one tackling selected neglected tropical diseases as a group. WHO will take this agenda forward using a three pronged approach: broader coverage with rapid-impact interventions, strengthened vector control to reduce transmission of several diseases, and improved surveillance and high-quality care of diseases such as leishmaniasis and sleeping sickness. Such an approach would permit the rapid expansion of currently limited access to existing safe and effective treatments that can be given to tackle a number of infections often afflicting the same individual. The control of neglected tropical diseases is a pro-poor initiative strategy for the masses in line with Millennium Development Goals.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Advances of biotechnology in tropical medicine

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The theme of our joint meeting is “Advances of Biotechnology in Tropical Medicine”. In keeping with that theme the address is a critical perspective of biotechnology’s contributions to the cure, prevention, and diagnosis of those diseases. It begins with the “housekeeping” historically shifting, definitions of “tropical medicine” and “biotechnology”. An example being that today’s metaphor for a tropical disease, malaria, was, 100 years ago, as much a problem of the temperate world as of the tropics. Biotechnology research is, undoubtedly, intellectually seductive. However it is necessary to distinguish what benefits it has tangibly produced or that which gives real promise of practical application. In this debatable area some comments by colleagues and their (as well as the speaker’s) “wish list” are noted. Finally, the issues of the balancing allocations in funding, personnel and educational needs between “operational” and biotechnological” research are considered.