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Improving Global Health: Focus on Chronic Disease

By LAURA LANDRO

When it comes to addressing health care, the debate in the U.S. is just a drop in the global bucket. The developing world is facing a host of health-care challenges—whose economic effects reach all the way to America's shores.

The Wall Street Journal's Laura Landro moderated the task-force discussion on global health.

Here are edited excerpts of the presentation of their priorities to the CEO Council.

Not Just a Moral Issue

MS. LANDRO: *Global health is not just a moral and ethical issue that we should be interested in, but also a leading driver of economic growth and productivity or the lack thereof. The Global Health Initiative at the World Economic Forum recently changed its focus from infectious to noncommunicable diseases. As George Halvorson from Kaiser-Permanente will explain, that came to the top of our list of recommendations.*

Journal Report



Read the [complete CEO Council report](#).

Plus, [see video excerpts of interviews](#) with leaders at the conference.

IMPROVING GLOBAL HEALTH CO-CHAIRS

René Lerer, Chairman and CEO, Magellan Health Services Inc.

George C. Halvorson, Chairman and CEO, Kaiser Permanente

SUBJECT EXPERT

Anthony S. Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

GEORGE HALVORSON: Until relatively recently, the developing world mostly suffered from issues of infectious disease. We're now seeing the rest of the world urbanizing. As people move from the countryside into cities, they're going from eating local diets and having a lot of physical activity to cities where they are basically inert and eating white rice, white wheat and different food materials. So, we're seeing an explosion of chronic conditions in the developing world. A majority of deaths are coming from chronic conditions.

We need to do a number of things. One is to facilitate physical activity, because when people are inactive, the body doesn't work well. In order to work at maximum levels, the body needs to move. We have to walk. When we do that, the neurochemistry is better, the physiology is better, the psychology is better, depression levels go down.

We need to pass that information on to the world and create environments where physical activity is safe, possible and encouraged. Rather than solving it at the back end with better treatments, we need to solve it at the front end by having fewer people becoming diabetic.

This feeds into the next recommendation, technology.

Technology is significantly underused in health care. We don't have optimal use of information flow. We have a shortage of health-care providers in the world, and a problem getting information about care delivery to patients in major parts of the world.



Ralph Alswang for The Wall Street Journal

'We're seeing an explosion of chronic conditions in the developing world': George Halvorson

The only way we're going to solve that problem is by creating a technology flow that will get information out to very basic-level caregivers in those settings, supported by primary-care doctors upstream electronically, supported by specialists, supported by electronic algorithms, supported by care systems.

What we need is a whole infrastructure of care delivery where we have applications that support care delivery. The world right now is full of iPhones. Everybody in the world is now electronically connected. That's an opportunity that we need to take advantage of. If we don't take advantage of that opportunity, we really won't be able to improve care in the world.

Suppling the Cure

MS. LANDRO: *Dr. Lerer is going to talk to us about the third and fourth priorities, starting with vaccine-preventable diseases.*



Ralph Alswang for The Wall Street Journal

'One goal is a collaboration with host countries to build a vaccine infrastructure': René Lerer

RENÉ LERER: We know that there are vaccines available for a number of diseases that we see world-wide that could have a material impact. One of the goals, clearly, is an industry-sponsored collaboration with the partner countries and the host countries to build an infrastructure for the development, the access to and then the delivery of the vaccines. By doing so in an aggressive way in partnership with those countries, we can truly make a difference both clinically and economically because of the financial impact of these diseases on the countries.

The last recommendation—and one that probably everyone would have thought would have come first because it's had the greatest exposure when talking about health care—is HIV/AIDS. As we've gone into developing countries and began to provide capabilities to treat patients with HIV/AIDS, we become successful in one country and then we see it pop up in another country. Developing countries begin to move forward in the continuum, and then other countries have similar issues. We know that today HIV/AIDS is one of the leading causes of death in these countries, extremely communicable, obviously.

The issue is not only the treatment of AIDS. Really, the goal is the prevention of AIDS. There are significant opportunities to prevent AIDS by treating those who have it or by educating folks on what it means to be preventative in AIDS.

The second piece was to create an infrastructure within the communities to develop sustainable health systems. Without a health system in a community, the ability to identify and deliver the drug or the treatment or the education becomes

The Top Four Recommendations

1. TACKLE NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Chronic diseases including heart, lung, diabetes, mental health and cancer are emerging as a leading threat to economic growth and account for 63% of deaths world-wide. Use technology, workplace wellness programs and health education to help treat and prevent these diseases and the growing global problem of obesity. Focus on "best buys" for prevention: tobacco, alcohol, diet, physical activity.

2. DEVELOP GLOBAL USE OF HEALTH TECHNOLOGY

Encourage the growth of a public-private global health-technology infrastructure. Expand use of electronic medical records, mobile applications for health monitoring, advice and education, wireless devices and telemedicine for diagnosis and treatment, particularly in underserved areas in the developing world.

3. TARGET VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASES

Create industry-sponsored purchase of vaccines and partner with host countries in building infrastructure needed to ensure vaccine delivery. This has the potential to eradicate certain diseases.

4. HALT SPREAD OF GLOBAL HIV/AIDS

Establish a public-private partnership involving a consortium of multisector businesses, nongovernmental organizations and the U.S. government to apply scientifically proven interventions to slow and ultimately end the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Strengthen sustainable health systems to improve access to preventive programs and pharmaceuticals.

extraordinarily difficult. Historically, you spend a lot of time talking about pharmaceuticals, but what we're talking about is building an infrastructure with the country, educating folks on how to prevent a disease, primarily, and then making available to them drugs and to help in the treatment of this disease.

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