

Basic needs, essential drugs and dispassionate medicine

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SUMMARY

The processes of economic globalization are shaping people's health across the world – and not for the better. The number of people in poverty has been increasing in some parts of the world, as has inequality between richer and poorer both within and between countries.

The deeply unjust mismatch between expenditure on medicines and health need mirrors global socio-economic disparities. 42% of global expenditure on medicines is spent on 5% of the world's population living in North America, while only 20% is spent on the majority of the world's population with the highest burdens of disease in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

The combined worth of the world's top five drug companies (Big Pharma) is twice the combined Growth National Product of all Sub-Saharan Africa, and their influence on the rules of world trade is many times stronger because they bring their

wealth to bear directly on the levers of western power.

New ways to fund and stimulate pharmaceutical Research & Development are needed to achieve the goal of universal access to essential medicines and avoid the huge inefficiencies and corruption of the current system.

Profit-motivated pharmaceutical companies, whether Big Pharma or generic manufacturers, cannot be left to operate without a strong regulatory framework to promote rational medicine use and patient safety. The erosion of independent national and international regulatory structures and powers must be reversed. Civil and especially scientific society must play a further watchdog role that holds pharmaceutical companies and government regulators accountable to high standards of ethical practice.

In parallel, the medicine practiced both in less developed countries and western societies must be impartial and focused in basic needs first.