SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMME AT RISK

Study in the Journal of Public Health Policy calls on Governments and private donors to provide funding

16 January 2014 – For twelve years, the World Health Organization’s Prequalification Programme (PQP) has helped to stem the tide of diseases such as HIV, TB, and malaria. But according to a group of former WHO directors and academics, this programme is at risk because it is entirely reliant on just two international organisations for funding.

Every year, billions of US dollars’ worth of medicines are purchased by or through international procurement agencies and NGOs—such as UNICEF, UNITAID, The Global Fund, Médecins Sans Frontières—and governments for use in developing countries. The WHO PQP helps ensure that these medicines meet acceptable standards of quality, safety and efficacy.

But an academic study to be published in the Journal of Public Health Policy on January 16th, written by four experts in international public health, calls for more sustainable funding in the fight against global public health threats.

Ms Ellen ’t Hoen, author and former policy and advocacy director of Médecins sans Frontières says: “We have found that this programme is effective, and saves money both directly and indirectly. Every dollar invested in the programme saves $170 in public medicine procurement. But 80-90% of the organisation’s funding comes from just two organisations – UNITAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

She adds: “UNITAID and BMGF have long recognized the value and impact of WHO medicines prequalification. Without their support many people would not be alive today. But it is time for governments and other donors to step up. We need a consortium of public and private global health donors to create a sustainable funding model and ensure that the medicines we distribute in developing countries work.”

In the year 2000, only one in a thousand people living with HIV in Africa had access to treatment. Since then, the WHO PQP has prequalified over 200 products for treatment of HIV/AIDs. Now, of 8 million people globally receiving treatment for HIV, 6.5 million (81%) are receiving antiretrovirals of assured quality.

Initially the programme focussed on providing low-cost generic versions of medicines to treat HIV, TB, and malaria, but it has evolved and expanded due to increasing demand, and now covers:

- Essential medicines for reproductive health, diarrhoea, and neglected tropical diseases
- Quality control laboratories
- Active pharmaceutical ingredients
- Review of clinical research used to prove that generic medicines are as good as the branded versions
- Capacity of medicines regulators and pharmaceutical manufacturers in developing countries of Africa and Asia.

-ENDS-

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