

## Whither World Health?

amfAR Co-Sponsors Global Health Symposium

Some 400 experts from the fields of science, public health, and policy gathered to assess the current state of global health and to discuss a road map for future collaborative action at an amfAR-co-sponsored symposium at the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C., October 11–12.

The symposium featured presentations by eminent figures such as Sir Richard Feachem, recently retired director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; and John Podesta, President Bill Clinton's chief of staff and now president and CEO of the Center for American Progress. Although discussions touched on a broad range of issues, time and again speakers returned to two core questions—what will be the greatest threats to world health in the immediate future, and what must we do to contain them?

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Globalization was cited by a number of participants as perhaps the most powerful force now operating in the realm of world public health. Noting the speed with which AIDS, avian flu, and other infectious diseases have been able to leap

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across national borders, amfAR’s senior medical and policy advisor Dr. Susan J. Blumenthal, one of the meeting’s organizers, noted, “Today, one nation’s problem is every nation’s problem. But the good news is that solutions cross borders, too.”

Underestimating the mutability and efficiency of the microbes that cause AIDS, tuberculosis, influenza, and other deadly diseases is one the most dangerous mistakes we can make, insisted Dr. Fauci. In the mid-1960s, he said, “many people in the U.S. proclaimed a near end to the era of infectious diseases—they didn’t understand the evolutionary capacity of infectious disease, which is the second leading cause of death worldwide.”

HIV/AIDS offers a particularly vivid lesson about the danger of ignoring an infectious disease, according to Dr. Feachem. “With future pandemics, if we do far too little, far too late, we will pay a huge price,” he predicted. “That is what we’ve done with HIV.”

In addition to analyzing specific future threats to global health, other symposium sessions offered information on innovative practices and new models for improving global health care. As part of a forum on scaleable, sustainable models for health-

care delivery, amfAR CEO Kevin Frost provided an overview of amfAR’s TREAT Asia initiative.

New models for international aid, such as TREAT Asia and the Global Fund, must be developed in order to effectively improve global health in the 21st century, stated Dr. Feachem. “In my 30 to 40 years I’ve seen huge progress and I’ve seen setbacks,” he concluded. “But we have today an unprecedented level of economic muscle, political commitment, and scientific expertise. So let’s get on with it.”

The symposium was co-sponsored by amfAR, the Embassy of Italy, the National Academies, and Partners HealthCare System. ■



*Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, amfAR’s senior medical and policy advisor Dr. Susan J. Blumenthal, and amfAR CEO Kevin Frost. (Photo: National Kidney Foundation)*