

“Honorary Biomedical Sciences & Health Information Lecture Series”



GLOBAL HEALTH AND NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

A Distinguished Lecture

By

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Abstract: Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of infections which, though caused by an array of different pathogens such as viruses, bacteria, protozoa and helminthes, are all linked to poverty, widespread suffering and disability, and even death. The 17 NTDs prioritized by WHO member states in 2010 affect more than 1 billion people, put over 2 billion more at risk and kill about half a million people worldwide. They are endemic in 149 countries, with concentration in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and especially in areas where there is poor access to clean water, to health services, to adequate housing, and to good sanitation. These diseases, some of them recorded in ancient civilizations, are termed “neglected” because not only are they most prevalent in, and impact on poor, underserved and politically marginalized populations where they cause significant ill health, disability and even death, but they are also neglected by research, by the pharmaceutical industry and also by national and international funding for health. From blinding onchocerciasis and trachoma, anemia-inducing helminthiasis and schistosomiasis, stigmatizing sleeping sickness and leprosy, to grossly disfiguring elephantiasis, NTDs cause chronic ill health, severe disability and disfigurement, and untold misery to sufferers. NTDs also impact negatively on the educational achievement of children, on agricultural productivity and food security, and on national economic development, a major impediment in developing countries. Women, children, ethnic minorities, internally-displaced and refugee populations are most vulnerable to, and suffer disproportionately from NTDs. In the affected countries, NTDs do indeed perpetuate the cycle of poverty. However, through global efforts that include public-private partnerships and funding from traditional and non-traditional sources, NTDs can, and are being controlled using effective methods such as preventive chemotherapy, innovative and intensified disease management, vector control and pesticide management, zoonotic disease management and safe drinking-water, improved sanitation and health education. Global goals agreed to by partners include, by 2020, eradicating Guinea worm disease, eliminating lymphatic filariasis, leprosy, sleeping sickness (human African trypanosomiasis), and blinding trachoma, and controlling schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthes, Chagas disease, visceral leishmaniasis, and onchocerciasis. A veritable “rags to riches” story of these ancient, debilitating and disfiguring diseases called NTDs.