

GSK Public policy positions

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the Developing World

The Issue

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which include diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular (CV), chronic respiratory diseases and mental health disorders, are the leading causes of death and disability across all countries – rich and poor. With NCDs on the rise, causing 14 million annual premature deaths in low and middle income countries, there is an ever increasing need to focus on NCDs, especially in developing countries, which already carry over half of the world's NCD burden and where the rate of increase is the greatest.

As a science and values led global healthcare company, GSK has an important role to play in improving the health, well-being and access to medicines of millions of people around the world. We want to help people to do more, feel better and live long healthy lives regardless of where they live or their ability to pay. We therefore feel we have an important role in responding to the growing burden of NCDs. This paper sets out GSK's recommendations on the response to the NCD challenge, with a particular focus on the developing world.

GSK's Position

- **Access to medicines and vaccines that treat and prevent NCDs should be increased in developing countries.** Many patients in emerging markets are not able to access NCD treatments, either because they are unaffordable or unavailable. Other issues include lack of cultural acceptability of western type treatment approaches and the particular local healthcare environment and patient lifestyle in developing countries. Industry has a key role to play in developing policies that are geared towards improving access to NCD treatments in the developing world. GSK is involved in various initiatives across many NCDs to address this issue. Our new Africa/Developing Countries Pharmaceuticals operating unit set up in 2014 (formerly the Developing Countries and Market Access operating unit established in 2010), consists of all countries across Sub-Saharan Africa and Least Developed Countries. The unit's aim is to increase R&D efforts on priority health needs in Africa, invest in our supply chain to enable business growth in the region and increase collaboration across Pharmaceuticals and Consumer Healthcare operations to ensure that our innovative healthcare products, including those that treat NCDs, reach more people.
- **Governments in countries in the developed world should support the availability and affordability of medicines that treat NCDs in the developing world.** Developed countries should play their part, in partnership with others, to help tackle the global NCDs burden. Increasing access to medicines which treat NCDs in developing countries depends, among other factors, on affordable prices. By supporting preferential prices that industry might offer developing countries by not referencing them in their own markets and by supporting innovation by respecting Intellectual Property (IP) and giving industry fair prices in developed markets, governments in the developed world can contribute significantly to ensuring that affordable medicines which treat NCDs, reach patients in developing countries.
- **The World Health Organization should develop Prescribing Guidelines focused on medicines that treat NCDs.** Accessibility and affordability of medicines alone is not sufficient to tackle the global NCDs burden; it is critical that guidance is provided on their use to maximise benefit to patients affected by NCDs. Although current guidance is available, this focuses mainly on the preventative aspects of NCDs, and covers only some, not all NCDs. A holistic set of Guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO), which incorporate treatment aspects and cover all NCDs, particularly guidelines and interventions that take into account the local healthcare and patient environment, which are regularly updated to accelerate the uptake of new interventions and bring benefits to patients more quickly, would be a welcome step in achieving this goal.

- **Stakeholders should work together collaboratively to create partnerships in the research area to develop innovative products and strategies to treat NCDs.** It is critical for the industry to invest in R&D and innovation if more patients are to benefit from truly innovative products to address conditions related NCDs, thereby improving quality of life, wellbeing and ultimately reducing mortality. The WHO report, *Priority Medicines for Europe and the World – 2013 Update*¹ reinforces the fact that many chronic NCDs contribute substantially to the disease burden (disability and mortality) in both Europe and the world, and acknowledges the importance of more research into the development of new medicines and the improvement of existing medicines to benefit all. In the context of emerging and developing countries, however, innovation does not always necessarily mean breakthrough products. For example, innovation in terms of packaging, dose forms, simplifying approaches to treatment strategies can also make a huge difference in access to medicines in these regions. The discovery of new medicines and approaches to treat NCDs can be greatly accelerated if companies work together in partnership.

Mental and neurological disorders (MNDs) are an increasing priority on the global health agenda. The profiles of these diseases raise particular challenges: lack of physical and visible symptoms, complex biological factors, and an incomplete understanding of cause and represent a good example of where greater collaboration could drive innovation. Ten companies across industry have recently joined a pact, the 'Accelerating Medicines Partnership'² to find breakthroughs in diseases like Alzheimer's. The idea is to pool intellect and best laboratory discoveries to create a research system to decipher such diseases, which are notoriously challenging. However in parallel with this increased research effort into MNDs, a clear emphasis also needs to remain on the nearer term needs to address MNDs in emerging and developing countries, such as strengthening the existing diagnostic and treatment capabilities in primary healthcare facilities; this will enable embedding of cost-effective treatment strategies for common mental health disorders.

- **Industry should ensure that it develops policies and actions which address global NCD variations.** The NCD burden is different in every country, dependent on the country setting and infrastructure; it is therefore important to develop NCD policies and actions that address the particular local healthcare environment. In 2014, GSK announced that it would invest £25 million to create the world's first R&D Open Lab for NCDs in Africa. The new R&D Open Lab will see GSK scientists collaborate with research and scientific centres across Africa from its hub at GSK's Stevenage R&D facility in the UK to conduct high quality epidemiological, genetic and interventional research to increase understanding of NCDs in Africa. The Open Lab aims to improve understanding of NCD variations seen in the Africa setting and use the insights to inform prevention and treatment strategies to enable researchers across academia and industry to discover and develop new medicines to address the specific needs of African patients.
- **Focusing on prevention and health education are critical in addressing in the NCD challenge.** Whilst medicines and vaccines are vital for those already suffering from NCDs, treatment alone will not tackle the NCDs burden. Given that NCDs share common risk factors, i.e. smoking, alcohol, poor diet and inactivity, the global response should adopt a similarly holistic approach in addressing the issues, focusing on a wide range of factors including initiatives to improve awareness of NCDs, management and prevention of their risk factors and the need for patients to adhere to their treatment. For example, GSK has a wide range of nicotine replacement therapies to try and help people quit smoking and prevent the development of multiple cancers. Additionally, new interventions are being developed to assist in prevention efforts, including new vaccines. For example in oncology, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide and the leading cause of cancer deaths in women in developing countries. Therefore cervical cancer prevention remains a key focus for GSK and our cervical cancer vaccine, *Cervarix*, is aimed at providing the best possible protection against cervical cancer.

¹ http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/priority_medicines/MasterDocJune28_FINAL_Web.pdf

² <http://www.nih.gov/science/amp/index.htm>

Background

Global response

The proportion of deaths accounted for by NCDs has risen over time, in part because economic growth and better treatments have helped reduce the burden of infectious disease. However, the unhealthy lifestyle choices that often accompany improvements in living standards, are also part of the explanation. The increased prevalence, particularly in developing countries, presents a new set of health challenges to already stretched health systems.

In September 2011, a High Level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of NCDs was convened by the UN General Assembly in New York – only the second time that a high-level UN meeting was dedicated to a health topic (the first time being HIV/AIDS in 2001). The Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly acknowledged that NCDs constitute one of the major challenges for development in the 21st century and requested the WHO to lead and coordinate global action against NCDs. In 2012, the WHO Member States agreed upon a global commitment to a 25% reduction in premature mortality due to NCDs by 2025. In May 2013, the World Health Assembly adopted the resolution on NCDs, endorsing the *WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020*³, the *Global Monitoring Framework on NCDs*⁴ and the establishment of the *Global Coordination Mechanism for NCDs*⁵.

Industry response

The pharmaceutical industry's response to the challenge of access to medicines in the developing world has up until now focused predominantly on neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and in particular on the WHO priority diseases of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB. The industry's focus on infectious diseases was largely a reflection of that of the global community: NCDs were omitted from the 2000 Millennium Development Goals, which has been a critical barrier to securing global focus and donor funding for NCDs. However, with NCDs on the rise, causing 14 million annual premature deaths in low and middle income countries and the developing world carrying the greatest burden of NCDs, the pharmaceutical industry is responding to the NCD challenge in the developing world. Ahead of the UN Summit in 2011, the industry published a Framework for Action for the Prevention and Control of NCDs⁶. The WHO has also identified a number of roles for the industry in support of its 25 by 25 strategy – a 25% reduction in preventable deaths from NCDs by 2025 – key amongst these is initiatives and policies in the workplace to help with the prevention agenda and industry's role in working in partnership with other stakeholders.

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³ http://www.who.int/nmh/events/ncd_action_plan/en/

⁴ http://www.who.int/nmh/global_monitoring_framework/en/

⁵ http://www.who.int/nmh/events/ncd_coordination_mechanism/en/

⁶ http://www.ifpma.org/fileadmin/content/Global%20Health/NCDs/IFPMA_Framework_for_Action_NCDs.pdf