

## Offline: The hypocritic oath

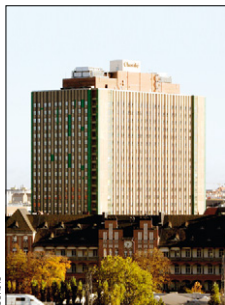


Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos

Key Global Fund donors—led by the US, UK, and Canadian governments—last week tried to destroy a pillar of the Fund’s new 5-year strategy, which seeks to open a door to an expanded role for the Fund in maternal, newborn, and child health. It was an astonishing attack against an organisation whose recipient countries and partners want urgently to broaden the Fund’s remit beyond the narrow agenda of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. In April, 2010, the Board made a commitment to encourage countries to integrate maternal and child health into their applications for AIDS, TB, and malaria funding. In December, the Board went further, recognising that the Global Fund had to develop a long-term strategy to integrate maternal and child health into its work. It asked the secretariat to develop “clear guidance” on how to do so. At last week’s Policy and Strategy Committee meeting, the Fund’s secretariat presented a proposal for a pilot for funding maternal and child health within its existing portfolio, notably where there were high burdens for AIDS, TB, and malaria *and* maternal and child mortality. An alliance between the US, UK, and Canadian delegations sought to kill the proposal. Only at the last minute did Sweden enter the debate and defend the idea so that it should survive for discussion at the full November Board meeting. The alliance between these three governments was a shameful attempt at sabotage. All three have supposedly prioritised integration of maternal and child health into their bilateral aid programmes. The stench of hypocrisy is strong.



World Health Summit 2011/Steffen Kugler



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Berlin has now secured its place on the global health calendar, and not a moment too soon in a world where Anglo-American hegemony stifles diversity in international health debates. The World Health Summit is in its third year. Held at the Charité hospital, where the towering presence of Rudolf Virchow can still be felt, last week’s meeting succeeded in being more cosmopolitan than ever before. A special focus was on how to translate evidence into policy. Tikki Pang, from WHO, brought together one fabulously expert panel. Themba Moeti (Botswana) showed how thorough economic analysis using reliable data drove political support for anti-retroviral roll out. Yot Teerawattananon (Thailand) explained how his country’s remarkable Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Programme



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delivered accurate but simple advice to ministers, strengthening trust and confidence between scientists and decision makers. Patricia Garcia (Peru) reported the incredible success of a syphilis prevention and treatment project (in Peru, syphilis is 20 times more common than AIDS). Hoda Rashad (Egypt) argued for the importance of supporting the very best science (not quick and dirty policy-relevant research). Finally, Annette Widmann-Mauz (from Germany, and who, as a member of the Bundestag, had to leave quickly to save the Euro) spoke of creating demand among parliamentarians for science-based advice. All agreed that scientists had to take more seriously their obligation to create an informed public discussion of science’s contribution to our wider culture.

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The Charité is a great hospital. And, like all famous institutions, it sometimes provokes controversy. Standing outside the conference were health workers from the hospital handing out leaflets saying that the “Charité causes poverty”. They claim that basic working rights at the hospital are denied. Their case concludes, “If the Charité wants to focus at the same time on ‘research for neglected diseases of poverty’, we get the impression that 2500 service employees get abused by Charité scientists as rats in a big field study.”

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Back to the World Health Summit itself. Each day at lunchtime there was a press conference. These were tepid affairs. The journalists present were largely asleep. Yet the panels included stars from politics, academia, and global health. What a missed opportunity. But an innovation introduced by the Summit’s organisers was to allow young people to watch, even take part in, the proceedings. One 10-year-old girl asked the question, “What are you all doing for the children of the world?” The panel of experts shifted uncomfortably in their seats, but then proceeded to give serious and enlightening answers. Perhaps we should be opening up our dry and stiff academic conferences more often to the fresh eyes of a new generation.

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