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Interview about the World Health Summit conducted by Nina Bublitz

"Caring for personal health should be everyone's goal"

In 2010 one of the most important international health conventions, The World Health Summit, will take place for the second time. Detlev Ganten, the President of the summit, explains what should urgently change, and that is everyone's attitude.



Professor Detlev Ganten is the World Health Summit President (October 10-13, 2010 in Berlin) and Chairman of the Foundation Board, Charité Foundation

The issue of health is going to be discussed at the World Health Summit in Berlin in October. The costs of the health care system play a huge role in this discussion.

We are standing on the threshold of a new era. Health care systems of the industrial nations, for instance the German system, risk ending up in a trap of huge costs. We will not be able to afford rising costs any longer although health is a very important issue – money cannot be spent in any better way.

What is the major problem in your point of view?

We have a “sick” supply system, instead of a “health care” system. This system is appropriate when it comes to sick people, when they suffer, when they go to the doctor and are (still) treated adequately. There even is an oversupply to some extent - whereas a high concentration of doctors and high-level medical supply do not necessarily lead to healthier people or people who are feeling any healthier.

We need to think about solutions which are necessary and reasonable from the medical point of view. Unfortunately, the scientific branch of Public Health, which deals with the population’s health and the health care system, is treated in a cursory manner in Germany. Our aim is to change this approach through the World Health Summit.

Real and ethically correct preventive health care – not the so called wellness programs that are very commercial – do not play a role so far. Not in everyday life, not in the life of doctors and not even in medical training. True preventive health care would mean a big achievement and would save money in the long run.



How should this sort of preventive health care look?

We need to raise consciousness for health issues at a very early age, with children. They must be given an understanding of their own biology, teaching them how to eat more healthily and to exercise. Educators and parents should teach this to the children, but without being too preachy. This awareness would mean to follow your natural wish for movement, for instance. Specifically this means: Go to the park instead of to the movies! Computer games need not be banned but changed to be more suitable for children and used in a limited way. Health should be a personal goal. If you attain this goal, many benefits will follow.

How will our health care system change in the coming years?

I would assume that there is not going to be a huge transformation all at once, but change in many small steps. This is reasonable as the mechanisms are so complicated that one should rather do one step after the other.

Will the costs be higher for each person?

There is a consensus that costs should not rise, however, who is supposed to pay for all of this? The rather indebted government is not able to spend more money. I doubt that employers will invest additional money. Perhaps the citizens – at least those who can afford it – are willing to contribute. For the others there is still the social state. This however leads to the question if the basic supply is able to give the individual the best that science has to offer? Or can wealthy people continue to buy more appropriate treatment than offered in the basic supply? Also very important are the measures that can be taken by the individual people which do not necessarily cost money. It is rather a question of priority when it comes to taking action while avoiding health destroying behavior. Not smoking or eating excessive sweets would save money in the long run, thus more money in our pockets!

You mean that the entire medical branch grasps what is considered normal in dentistry already: Only those who pay will receive optimal treatment?

This will not be taken into consideration with life saving measures. But with many other methods where the treatment itself is expensive and doctors have a choice of what method to offer according to price, this could be an alternative.

Thus you are saying that only those who will receive health care are those who are able to afford it?

This should not happen in wealthy countries such as Germany. The important fact to my mind is not the financial contribution of the patient but contribution to preventative health care in general – it should be our defined goal to live in a more active and more healthy way.

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