

Clear Signal from the M8 Alliance of Medicine at the World Health Summit

More than 700 top-level and prominent opinion-leaders from politics, economics, science and civil society met in Berlin from 15 to 18 October 2009 to discuss subjects which will occupy medical research and healthcare worldwide over the next ten years. The participants from more than 60 countries declared the summit a great success.

A Need for Action

All players in healthcare followed the call to participate in the World Health Summit. “We have recognised that there is a need to act to manage the challenges, and together, we want to achieve health for everyone.” “The basic human right to health, which is anchored in the UN Charter, can only be implemented if everyone works together,” states Professor Detlev Ganten, President of the World Health Summit, Charité. “Our aim of permanently improving health standards cannot be realized without international cooperation across all the sectors involved.”

Coordinated Action Is Essential

“We know that an initial meeting cannot lead to improved global health and that this objective is very ambitious in itself. This is only possible in the long run and only if global players act with better and longer-term coordination,” Ganten said. “We are facing enormous medical and structural challenges. No group of players can handle these challenges alone; naturally, we scientists cannot do so either. Academic medicine must take on greater responsibility here.”

Germany’s return to the International Global Health Stage

“For too long now, Germany has been almost invisible in global health. Discourse has been almost exclusively Anglo-American,” observed Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief at The Lancet. “This makes the World Health Summit an extraordinary event. Once Germany had a reputation as world leader in medicine thanks to remarkable individuals such as Virchow, von Behring, Koch, Ehrlich, Kossel, Warburg, Hain and Krebs. The World Health Summit was the first serious attempt in half a century to put Germany back on the map of global medicine. It succeeded. The health predicaments faced by nations and peoples today need the intellectual capacities that are available within German healthcare, research and civil society to join the growing international movement for health,” Horton added.

Key Points

- ▲ Foundation of the M8 Alliance as a worldwide academic network
- ▲ Implementation of the UN Charter “Healthcare is a universal human right”.
- ▲ Challenges in global healthcare include access to medical care, pandemics and infectious diseases, effects of climate change on health, aging populations, restructuring and financing healthcare systems.
- ▲ Opinions are divided regarding the application and implementation of personalized medicine.
- ▲ Clinical research is excessively regulated.
- ▲ Coordinated action by science and civil society through political and economic channels is needed.
- ▲ Global health is a feasible aim.

“It was time for German medicine to find its voice again. At the World Health Summit it did find that voice. It is now up to German health professionals to listen and respond with equal vision and commitment,” Horton pointed out. Under the patronage of the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel, together with French President Sarkozy, the Federal Republic has made a clear statement of its engagement in international and European responsibility.

Professor Karl Max Einhäupl, CEO of the Charité in Berlin, emphasized: “The Charité will take its responsibility seriously and provide initiatives for the future. We will meet this challenge. Universities must bridge the gap between medical challenges and political solutions in our healthcare systems and be ready to act as a platform for multidisciplinary solutions and create space for innovations – in terms of both science and technology and of institutions.”

Health Is Global and Global Health Is Local

The Summit has taken a decisive step towards achieving its aim of establishing health as a human right. This is only possible through the co-operation of all involved. Professor Peter Piot, Director of the Institute for Global Health at Imperial College in London and former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations as well as former Executive Director of UNAIDS, sees the need for worldwide governance in the healthcare sector: “Piot sent out a call to everyone to assume greater responsibility, because: “Health is global and global health is local.” Our task is to bring the results of medical advances more quickly to the people who are waiting for them. We have begun to unite the forces from politics, research, science and civil society into a single voice in order to improve world health. Everyone is asked to participate.