

UNIVERSITIES ALLIED FOR ESSENTIAL MEDICINES

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Universities Allied for Essential Medicines

Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM) is a coalition of students, faculty and researchers at top universities across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Our mission is to (1) ensure every health-related innovation developed in campus laboratories is made available in the developing world at the lowest possible cost, and (2) increase the amount and impact of university research on neglected diseases. In the course of our work, we are helping to train and connect the next generation of leaders in global public health.

Universities and the Global Health Crisis

According to the World Health Organisation, ten million people—most of them in developing countries—die needlessly every year because they do not have access to existing medicines and vaccines (access gap). Moreover, many diseases affecting millions of the world's poorest remain entirely overlooked because the destitute sick suffering from these neglected diseases do not constitute a sufficient market opportunity to attract commercial research and development (research gap).

Efforts to tackle these problems by focusing on governmental actors or international treaties, while vital, face serious obstacles. The voice of the pharmaceutical lobby too often overwhelms those of health advocates from civil society and developing countries.

In this environment, universities have a critical role to play:

- **As major contributors to drug development, universities are uniquely positioned to influence the way lifesaving medical technologies are developed and deployed.** A 2000 U.S. Senate report found that 15 of the 21 drugs with the greatest therapeutic impact were developed using federally funded research, most of which occurs at universities.
- **At the same time, universities are a promising locus for change.** Universities hold an avowed commitment to creating and disseminating knowledge for the public good, and they have pledged to see the technologies they develop deployed to benefit the world. Decision-makers are expected to be responsive to students and faculty, and reasoned debate, not power, is expected to be the currency on campus.

Our Campaign

In light of the unique position of students to drive change at their schools, UAEM is leading an international student-run campaign to achieve systematic change in university policies. We seek to:

- Ensure every relevant university-developed drug is licensed with a concrete, effective, transparent strategy to make affordable versions available in developing countries; and

- Encourage university research on neglected diseases and university licensing practices that facilitate development of promising neglected disease treatments.

These changes could save millions of lives, at little or no cost to universities, pharmaceutical companies, or U.S. taxpayers.

In its first campaign, UAEM helped convince Yale University and Bristol-Meyers Squibb to permit generic production of a critical Yale-discovered HIV-AIDS drug, stavudine, thereby triggering radical price reductions across sub-Saharan Africa. In the years since this initial victory, UAEM's student leaders have convened experts to develop and publish model humanitarian licensing terms; met with university technology transfer offices across the country, planted the seeds of significant change in university policy; and mobilised students and faculty at nearly 40 top research institutions across the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.

Gathering Momentum

Building on this progress, in August 2006, UAEM took our campaign to the next level—targeting higher level university administrators, increasing our national coordination, and launching a push for greater public visibility. With only a modest budget, these efforts have already created a sea change in discussion of university licensing practices:

- In November 2006, UAEM released the Philadelphia Consensus Statement, a simple statement of our policy proposals. Over a hundred of the highest profile luminaries in science, medicine, and health policy lent their voices to this public call. Thousands of other students, faculty, and supporters at over a hundred campuses around the world joined them.
- *Nature*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the *Financial Times* each covered UAEM's activities. The *Boston Globe* endorsed UAEM's proposals. Numerous other campus, online, and local publications also published stories, drawing attention to the issue nationwide.
- Working closely with UAEM, Senator Patrick Leahy (VT) introduced legislation that would mandate humanitarian licensing terms, modeled on the terms UAEM is urging universities to adopt voluntarily.

This wave of activity has already led to movement by key schools. In March, eleven leading research universities took an important step forward: in a white paper on best licensing practices, the signatories recognised universities' fundamental responsibility to ensure the fruits of their research benefit the world's poor and committed to the principle at the heart of UAEM's Consensus Statement.

How You Can Get Involved

- Join UAEM through our website at: <http://www.essentialmedicine.org>
- Figure out what steps your university currently takes to ensure access to its innovations in poor countries by talking to faculty members, technology transfer officers, and administrators who set the university research agenda.
- Learn more about the access and research gaps through organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières (see <http://www.accessmed-msf.org/>) and build awareness on your own campus.