



Geneva Health Forum 2008

Strengthening Health Systems and the Global Health Workforce

The Business of Health, the Health of Business

Wednesday, 28 May 2008

11:00-12:30

International Conference Centre Geneva
Room 18

Health is critical to economic growth and development. While governments remain accountable for the availability of quality health services and the promotion of healthier lifestyles, the private sector's role in health becomes more and more prominent. With the extension and growing complexity of global health problems, private sector involvement, through private philanthropy as well as public-private partnerships, is now a reality and has brought up additional resources to the global efforts to improve health and reduce poverty.

From a business perspective, ill-health and diseases hinder performance and cause a high burden on competitiveness. CEOs in the US ranked healthcare costs as their number one economic pressure¹, while McKinsey predicted that by 2008, the healthcare costs of Fortune 500 companies would have been higher than their net profit².

From a legal perspective, corporations all over the world and from all sectors have to comply with their social and ecological duties. With globalization, international trade and business activities have increased. Simultaneously the availability of information, through internet and mass media has contributed to the fact that companies are increasingly being watched and their contribution to global development questioned. Business leaders are increasingly aware of these challenges and strive to ensure a proper and acceptable response to these expectations.

Beyond the supply of markets, the respect of rules and norms, and the provision of productive employment, many companies are increasingly involved in health programmes. As a self concern or as part of a sincere recognition of their moral responsibilities, many businesses expand their corporate social responsibility commitments, being more active in the promotion and protection of the health of their employees, communities and beyond.

Most of the current initiatives remain workplace health programs targeting such condition as HIV, or chronic disease control and wellness of the employees.

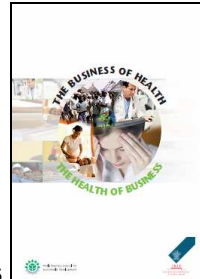
This session aims at fostering debate on the success of such initiatives, their role in creating a virtuous dynamic and their impact on health outcomes. The invited speakers will address the role of private companies in health drawing examples from programs tackling chronic diseases and wellness in the workplace initiatives.

- Are we harnessing the full potential of private sector involvement in health?
- What are companies ready to do?
- What are the roles of the different parties concerned, and how can employer-worker collaboration on health be supported?
- Are corporate initiatives more effective than public health programs, or do they undermine public services?
- How do corporate and public initiatives complement each other?
- How can we share and learn from examples of good practice in different countries?

¹ Berry, LL, AM Mirabito and DM Berwick. A Health Care Agenda for Business. MIT Sloan 2005. Management Review v45(4); 56-64.w

² McKinsey Quarterly 2004, No. 1.

References



The Business of Health - The Health of Business

Ill-health and disease impair business performance by hampering individuals, communities and markets. The examples gathered in this publication:

http://www.wbcSD.org/DocRoot/Q6UaBblOgFSiWDpTEpXE/business_of_health.pdf (1.2 MB) by the WBCSD and IBLF serve to illustrate the business case for corporate action on health.

WHO DPAS: http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy_english_web.pdf

WHO Action Plan:

http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB122/B122_9-en.pdf

Preventing Noncommunicable Diseases in the Workplace through Diet and Physical Activity
WHO/World Economic Forum Report of a Joint Event

<http://www.weforum.org/documents/gov/gov08/fbrc/WHOWEF.pdf>

World Economic Forum documentation on wellness in the workplace initiative:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/Wellness/index.htm>

ILO Social Protection Department (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection>) covers:

Occupational health and safety (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/index.htm>),

Social security (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/secsoc/index.htm>),

Conditions of work (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/index.htm>),

Migration (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/index.htm>)

and the ILO Programme on HIV-AIDS and the World of Work

(<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/indexmore.htm>)