

Pharma giants open up drug patents in new collaboration

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Pharmaceutical giants and the UN intellectual property agency launched Wednesday a collaboration to share certain patented drug information with public organisations.

The cooperation is aimed at the development of [new drugs](#) and vaccines for around 20 diseases, including neglected tropical diseases, malaria and tuberculosis, and will involve major drugmakers including Novartis, AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Merck and Sanofi.

AstraZeneca chief executive David Brennan said the British [pharmaceutical giant](#) would make all its patents available to the collaboration called WIPO Re:Search.

"WIPO Re:Search has the potential to make a real impact on [global health](#), which is why we are proud to make all patents owned by AstraZeneca available to this important initiative," he said.

Under the scheme, the intellectual property licences on these drugs would be available free of charge for the world's poorest countries, said Francis Gurry, who heads the [World Intellectual Property](#) Agency.

Developed nations meanwhile would have to negotiate for the licences, although Gurry said the fee levied would be "modest."

Some [tropical diseases](#) are regarded to be "neglected," as just one percent of the 1,400 drugs developed between 1975 and 1999 were

targetted at illnesses which affect one in every six persons, according to the [World Health Organisation](#).

These diseases threaten the lives of a billion people in the world, the health agency added.

Medecins sans Frontieres however, criticised the WIPO initiative, noting that it offers royalty-free licences to least developed countries only.

It noted that many people affected by the diseases are not in the least developed countries. These countries would have to negotiate for access to patents on a case-by-case basis.

"WIPO is taking an unacceptable step in the wrong direction by setting the bar for access too low," said the medical NGO.

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