

Global health requires new dynamics, suggests science panel

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Basic science plays a critical role in the quest to improve global health, but it's only one part of a multi-pronged effort that includes changing the dynamics of global health so that developing nations have a more leading role in fulfilling their health care needs.

That was among the conclusions of the 2012 Kavli Prize Science Forum in Oslo, Norway, held this week. The Forum featured four leading international [science experts](#) on global health: Rita Colwell, former director of the National Science Foundation, US; Alice Dautry, president of the Institut Pasteur, France; Harvey Fineberg, president of the Institute of Medicine, US; and Kiyoshi Kurokawa, chairman of the Health and Global Policy Institute, Japan.

Moderated by BBC News science correspondent Pallab Ghosh, the discussion also included an opening address by Prime Minister of Norway [Jens Stoltenberg](#). (A recording of the webcast is available at: <http://www.kavlifoundation.org/kavli-prize-science-forum>)

"I would like to see the resource commitment for a sufficient emphasis on essential research, led by those in the countries where the problems exist and need to be solved," said panelist Harvey Fineberg, president of the Institute of Medicine in the United States. "...[G]iving the resources, the training and the means to those in the local setting would [result in] science that is truly directed at the essential problems for health today."

Panelist Rita Colwell, former director of the U.S. National Science

Foundation, said her top priority for marshaling the power of science toward improving global health was a simple one: "It's very easy for me to say what my passion is and it is safe water, coupled with sanitation. We can do more by providing that commodity ... to the countries of the world that lack it, because we address immediately so many diseases for which we don't have vaccines and it's very unlikely that we will have vaccines."

Another priority is improving scientific and health care training in developing countries, said Alice Dautry, president of the Institut Pasteur in France. "By training you multiply so much of your actions because you train two people and they (each) train two others and it becomes exponential. To me this would be my priority."

For Kiyoshi Kurokawa, chairman of the Health and Global Policy Institute in Japan, another key is encouraging people to think globally. "In this world, science is a borderless frontier," he said. He particularly pressed the need for people to appreciate that having a healthy life means being part of a healthy nation and world. Toward this aim, he emphasized steps for broadening the thinking of youth, so new generations have a fuller understanding and perspective of being part of a global community.

In an opening address, Prime Minister of Norway Jens Stoltenberg celebrated advances in genetics and molecular biology that have led to remarkable life-saving vaccines and medications. But he noted that many infectious diseases persist, such as malaria from water-borne insects and diarrheal diseases from unsafe water and sanitation. "Millions of women and children die from medical conditions that could easily have been prevented and treated ... [and] more than 1.7 million children die every year from diseases that can be prevented by vaccination," he said. "We must support the research that leads to new and better vaccines."

The Forum also focused on a number of other issues related to the quest for improving global health. This included the need for more effective vaccines that are distributed more efficiently; the ability of genomics research to quickly identify and track the spread of infectious diseases; the promise of advanced computing that can handle huge amounts of "big data" to effectively track global health trends and rapidly-emerging crises; and the challenge of implementing low-tech measures to fight malaria, cholera and other deadly epidemics.

In explaining the importance of basic science in meeting today's global health challenges, Nils Stenseth, president of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, noted that improving [global health](#) depended on methodologically sound science. Robert W. Conn, president of The Kavli Foundation, cited the progress in diagnosing and treating HIV as a powerful example. "Without the basic science established by virologists, cell and molecular biologists, and so many others the drug treatments that we have today would have taken much longer to develop, with even greater suffering and loss of life," he said. "Think how long it took to control polio. So I say simply that basic science really matters, and supporting it matters even more."

Provided by The Kavli Foundation

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