

BRICS countries vow to help poor nations in health

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Chinese Health Minister Chen Zhu reacts during a press conference for the first BRICS Health Ministers Meeting in Beijing, China, Monday, July 11, 2011. The world's top emerging countries banded together Monday to help fight diseases in the poorest countries, pledging to transfer technologies to the developing world to help supply cheap and effective drugs. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

(AP) -- The world's top emerging countries banded together Monday to help fight diseases in the poorest countries, pledging to explore the transfer of technologies to the developing world to enable poor nations to produce cheap and effective lifesaving medicines.

Health ministers from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - the so-called BRICS countries - meeting in Beijing said their collaboration would help strengthen health systems and increase access to affordable medicines for diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis.

Such cooperation could pressure multinational pharmaceutical companies. Brazil and India have been at the forefront of promoting generic drugs as an affordable alternative to expensive brand-name medicines for people in [developing nations](#).

South African Health Minister Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi

said the BRICS countries could influence global attitudes on access to cheap medicine in the developing world. BRICS countries account for 40 percent of the world's population.

"For my country it is absolutely essential, as we know most of the developing world is in [sub-Saharan Africa](#), which is unfortunately the theater of the battle against [communicable diseases](#) like HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria," Motsoaledi said on the sidelines of the meeting.

"It is within BRICS countries that most of the affordable drugs are found to supply the [developing world](#). So we think the partnership is strong enough to be able to influence events around the world," he said.

It was the first ministerial-level meeting of [health officials](#) from the emerging countries' bloc, and the countries said they would collaborate with international health organizations such as the [World Health Organization](#) and the U.N. agency, UNAIDS, to increase access to affordable, safe and effective medicines and vaccines.

Michel Sidibe, UNAIDS executive director, welcomed the bloc's efforts to push for the needs of the [poorest countries](#), noting that Brazil and India have long aided efforts to provide drugs to people living with HIV/AIDS.

"BRICS is a new voice," Sidibe said at a news conference. "It will help us to change the course of debate on public health by bringing to the center the voice of the poorest segment of society by making sure that social justice and the redistribution of opportunities will become a major aspect of the way we deliver public goods to the people."

Though largely an ad-hoc grouping at present, BRICS has the potential to be a new force in world affairs on the back of their massive share of global

population and economic growth. With the inclusion of South Africa this year, the group accounts for 40 percent of the world's people, 18 percent of global trade and about 45 percent of current growth, giving them formidable heft when dealing with the developed economies.

The group is willing to play a larger role in financing global health efforts, but not as a replacement for the support of richer nations, said Brazilian Health Minister Alexandre Padilha at a news conference.

Russia's [Health Minister](#) Tatyana Golikova said the group should work on establishing a database for pricing and patents of medical devices and equipment and also cooperate in fighting counterfeit medical products.

BRICS countries should increase production of affordable [generic drugs](#), because if such countries could compete with other manufacturers, drug prices would fall, said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

The health meeting comes after leaders of the five countries held a one-day summit in the southern Chinese resort of Sanya in April at which they said they wanted a stronger voice in the international financial order.

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