Special theme – Communicable diseases in south-east Asia

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Q: Where is this “ruthless discipline” needed?
A: Ruthless discipline in objectivity, measurement and in priority-setting: we need to identify the big problems and approach them seriously. We need to fund only interventions that work (in the case of smoking – taxes, advertisement bans and cessation clinics) and not resort to wishful thinking (for example, anti-smoking messages within school health curricula). Moreover, in this Internet era, even weak or biased research can easily create headlines and force governments to react to what appear to be priorities. To counter some of these flights of fancy, we need to ensure ongoing and sufficient public funding of epidemiological research. Such research keeps political attention focused on the big problems and also helps to keep politicians accountable for better health.

Recent news from WHO

• On 29 January, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan welcomed the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledge of US$ 10 billion over the next ten years to accelerate global vaccine efforts. “The Gates Foundation’s commitment to vaccines is unprecedented, but needs to be matched by unprecedented action. It’s absolutely crucial that both governments and the private sector step up efforts to provide life-saving vaccines to children who need them most,” said Dr Chan.

• The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announcement comes on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI). Dr Chan also congratulated the GAVI Alliance on its accomplishment of reaching 257 million additional children with new and underused vaccines.

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: http://www.who.int/mediacentre