

Canadian health challenge to help poor nations

Last Updated: Monday, May 3, 2010 | 3:18 PM ET [Comments 9](#) [Recommend 10](#)
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Canada's Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, right, and Dr. Peter Singer hold a microscope during the launch of Grand Challenges Canada in Toronto on Monday. (Nathan Denette/Canadian Press)

Diagnosing diseases such as malaria more quickly in developing countries through novel tests is one focus of a new Canadian program announced Monday.

Grand Challenges Canada was unveiled in Toronto on Monday with the announcement by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty of the first challenge: the creation of test strips to diagnose diseases at a patient's bedside.

Grand Challenges is getting \$225 million in federal funding over five years — money announced in 2008.

Malaria kills nearly a million people a year in developing countries, mainly children under age five in

Africa. But currently, if a child under five comes to a clinic with a fever in the developing world, there is no way to tell whether it's caused by malaria, pneumonia or something else.

'Little test strips help you test the cause of the fever so you can institute the appropriate treatment.'

— Dr. Peter Singer

Samples get sent to a laboratory 100 kilometres away, and by the time the results come back, it can be too late to make a decision about treatment, said Dr. Peter Singer, director of the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health in Toronto and executive officer of Grand Challenges Canada.

"Little test strips help you test the cause of the fever so you can institute the appropriate treatment," Singer said in an interview with CBC News. "That's a way to save 100,000 lives [annually] from malaria alone."

Singer likened the test strips to cellphones that bypass the need for landlines. In this case, the aim is to bypass the laboratory roadblock. Health workers would be able to perform a low-cost test and get a result at the patient's bedside that assesses the disease stage and provides information on prognosis for a range of diseases that plague developing countries.

The test strip itself has not been developed.

5 projects to be funded

Innovation is the key to improving diagnosis, a prelude to effective treatment that saves lives, and that is what the funding announcement is about, Singer said.

Grand Challenges Canada will identify, fund and support a total of five such health projects, using money announced in the 2008 federal budget.

"Grand Challenges Canada will lead the way in making a better, safer and healthier world," Flaherty said in a news release. "It is an ambitious new Canadian organization aimed at supporting global partnerships to solve the developing world's most difficult and pressing health challenges."

Grand Challenges Canada calls itself an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of people in developing countries by integrating scientific, technological, business and social innovation. The mission is to identify global challenges, fund researchers and organizations to address them, support their implementation and commercialize solutions.

The organization works with the International Development Research Centre, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and other global health foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to find sustainable long-term solutions.

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at 3:20 PM ETWhat's that old saying again? Oh, yeah. "Save a life, you become responsible for it."

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at 3:19 PM ETCanada is #1 on the aid scam list for charitable organizations. Africa already gets over 2

BILLION from us for new "Benzes, now more funeelling going on to for-profit agencies.
We are taxed to death, stop it!

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[Dant11](#) wrote:Posted 2010/05/03
at 3:13 PM ETJudyB44;

Most of the 1.7 billion you are complaining about the Feds cutting will mostly be positions that aren't really needed and other wasted materials and services where we are not getting our monies worth. As for helping out poor countries, well here in Canada we should be very thankful that we have much higher standards and quality so we don't have the same health problems.

When Canadians get sick there is usually easy access to medical personnel but in many poor countries some people go their entire lives without ever seeing a doctor. I think most Canadians would agree that everyone deserves medical care when needed ! I always thought helping others in need was part of what being Canadian is all about !

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[Dalek Prime](#) wrote:Posted 2010/05/03
at 3:11 PM ETSaving lives to watch them starve later. Brilliant.

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[Kajere](#) wrote:Posted 2010/05/03

at 3:11 PM ET'But currently, if a child under five comes to a clinic with a fever in the developing world, there is no way to tell whether it's caused by malaria, pneumonia or something else.

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The above observations are not completely true and to generalize them can lead to significant levels of misinformation.

It is true that some preliminary diagnosis of certain diseases are not ubiquitous in health facilities in Africa. If trying to isolate the cause of a fever a health service provider uses the process of elimination, which is quite prevalent, it is common to perform a quick malaria test to confirm if malaria is the cause.

Malaria tests are not only common in many health facilities (urban, semi urban, rural and semi rural), they are also performed with very high degrees of accuracy. In fact as far as malaria diagnoses are concerned, service providers in many (if not most) health facilities are extremely efficient. In general, in

the unlikely event that certain tests cannot be performed on site as alluded to in the article, patients are referred to the next higher level health facility. So the question of sending samples to sites 100Km away is hardly an issue.

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