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Global Leaders in Dementia Meet to Stop Alzheimer's by 2025

European, North American and Asian leaders from industry, government, science and advocacy convene in Lausanne for critical discussions

Lausanne, Switzerland – On December 15-16, experts convened in Lausanne to define an action plan to speed effective treatments and diagnostics for Alzheimer's disease by 2025. This year's two-day meeting under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), entitled "Global Action to Drive Innovation in Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias: Connecting Research, Regulation and Access," focused on the drug development process critical to both bringing a drug to market and delivering treatment to patients. It comes at an important time as the expected completion of several rigorous research programs offers new hope for innovative treatments that could be on the market in the coming years.

The event was hosted by the Swiss government, in partnership with The Global CEO Initiative on Alzheimer's Disease (CEOi) and Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI). Participants – a rich array of scientific experts, global patient advocates, government officials and industry leaders – drew attention to the drug pipeline, new technologies, regulatory efforts and cooperation opportunities that could best speed global access to dementia therapies.

"The discussions at this forum were a natural progression of last year's meeting, where we discussed strategies to meet the global goal of developing a disease-modifying drug by 2025," stated Dirk Pilat, Deputy Director, Directorate for Science, Technology & Innovation at the OECD. "If we succeed in finding a treatment for the disease in the next decade, we will need to develop models and pathways for greater access throughout OECD countries, which already bear a large burden of the disease. Dementia's accelerating impact poses an unprecedented public health crisis for OECD member states."

The event provided the foundation for year-round collaboration and communication between national and international stakeholders. "The OECD is well-positioned to convene leaders from throughout the dementia space to define the best methods for improving access, and strategize their implementation," said Peter Schintlmeister, Chair of OECD's Working Party on Biotechnology, Nanotechnology and Converging Technologies.

Together, these different parties will spearhead the transition of Alzheimer's therapies from the specialized area of clinical research to usage by the growing, global patient population. "Making therapeutic solutions a key priority; however, if we don't innovate existing research processes, regulatory models and evidentiary requirements, scientific advances will have a limited effect on patients' lives," said Isabella Beretta, Scientific Advisor for International Cooperation in Research and Innovation at the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI.

Those attending the conference combined deep knowledge and practical experience of the disease. “The expertise seen today is both necessary for the rapid delivery of new medicines and for an increased innovative pace in dementia solutions to Alzheimer’s and dementia,” said George Vradenburg, Convener of The Global CEO Initiative on Alzheimer’s Disease. “Currently, a lack of advanced biomedical tools in the regulatory process, lengthy, fragmented national approval pathways and confusion about the value of Alzheimer’s drugs could all pose substantial challenges to patient access. The goal of the forum was to find innovative processes that surmount these obstacles.”

The number of patients with Alzheimer’s disease is projected to double every twenty years as the global population ages, growing to over 130 million individuals by 2050. Without a therapeutic response, the disease threatens to devastate patients, families and the world economy. “This meeting addressed the critical point at which scientific advances enter the lives of those suffering from dementia and highlighted the gap that currently exists between engagement with those living with the disease and those participating in research,” said Marc Wortmann, Executive Director of Alzheimer’s Disease International.

Much of the increase in dementia will take place in low and middle-income countries. “The impact in developing countries will be particularly difficult,” said Shekhar Saxena, Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organization (WHO). “These are countries that will face the greatest burden with the fewest resources to cope with or respond to this challenge. WHO has a particular responsibility to assist these countries.”

“It is clear that no single country, sector or organization can overcome the challenge posed by Alzheimer’s. It represents a significant health burden and, therefore, should have a significant public health response – an effort to which Switzerland is committed,” said Tania Dussey-Cavassini, Vice-Director General of Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and Switzerland’s Ambassador for Global Health. “We hope to build on the work of this year’s forum, and contribute to a comprehensive, global victory over Alzheimer’s. That is why Switzerland is also advocating for a resolution on Alzheimer’s to be adopted by the World Health Assembly.”

The forum’s attendees and organizers committed to ongoing efforts following the event, and plan to reconvene in 2016 to assess progress, new developments and new opportunities.

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