



The Rt Hon Matthew Hancock
Department of Health & Social Care
39 Victoria St
London
SW1H 0EU

The Rt Hon Rory Stewart
Department for International Development
22 Whitehall
London
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THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
on HIV & AIDS

Friday 17th May 2019

Dear The Rt Hon Matthew Hancock and The Rt Hon Rory Stewart MP,

Re: Improving transparency in biomedical research and development (R&D) and the medicines market

I am writing on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on HIV&AIDS to express my concerns regarding the lack of transparency in the current system for researching, developing and producing medicines. I urge the UK Government to take advantage of an upcoming historic opportunity at the 72nd World Health Assembly to introduce greater transparency in the R&D system.

For decades the high price of medicine has been a major barrier to people getting the treatments they urgently need in low- and middle-income countries. Globally, every year 100 million people are being pushed into poverty because of out of pocket healthcare expenses. Whilst gains have been made in reducing the price of some HIV treatments, new therapies for HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis C, diabetes and cancer remain prohibitively expensive.

The issue of high drug prices is now affecting high income countries, including the UK. As highlighted by the recent Health & Social Care Committee's 'Availability of Orkambi on the NHS' inquiry, thousands of children and young people in the UK still don't have access to vital cystic fibrosis drugs because of the high prices charged by the pharmaceutical company Vertex.

There are asymmetries in access to information between the pharmaceutical industry and governments, about many aspects of the innovation and supply chain for medicines, vaccines and other health technologies. The systematic lack of transparency contributes to high price medicines and unequal access, unclear investment flows for research & development, limited data from clinical trials and prevents proper accountability of institutions.

Italy, with ten co-sponsors from Europe, Asia and Africa, have submitted a draft resolution on transparency to the World Health Organization (WHO) to be discussed at the 72nd session of the World Health Assembly (WHA). The Resolution seeks to improve the transparency of medicine prices, R&D costs (which includes a great deal of public funding) and clinical trials. Access to this data will allow for a more informed discussion over what constitutes a fair price and remedy the information asymmetry between governments and the pharmaceutical companies when negotiating medicine prices. This asymmetry of knowledge in negotiations, where companies know what prices they can obtain in which markets but governments do not, allows companies to maximise prices in all countries,



which can result in low and middle-income countries paying more than high-income countries for medicines.

The UK has a historic opportunity to take-action on reforming our R&D model next week when WHO member states meet to discuss Italy's resolution. However, the amendments to the resolution text suggested by the UK at last week's informal consultations, plus other proposed changes from other high-income countries, would make this resolution significantly weaker. It is particularly disappointing that the UK Government is pushing for every mention of 'high prices' to be deleted and want the proposed measures to be voluntary at a national level.

Last month 35 cross-party MPs joined me in calling on the UK government to support this WHO resolution. With growing public and parliamentary support for reforming our R&D model, I urge the UK Government to act in the national public interest and re-asses its amendments. Instead the UK should support an effective resolution that can achieve global progress in increasing transparency in the R&D system.

After the World Health Assembly, the APPG on HIV and AIDS would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and representatives from the UK's delegation to discuss this issue further. If your diary permits, please get in touch with the APPG's Policy Advisor pellys@parliament.uk.

We urgently await your response.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Doughty MP – Chair of the APPG on HIV&AIDS
Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Cardiff South and Penarth