

Elizabeth Rajasingh, KEI, on Agenda Item 14.1

May 8, 2015

Good Morning, My name is Elizabeth Rajasingh and I am the Perls Research and Policy Fellow at Knowledge Ecology International.

Under Agenda Item 14.1, *Monitoring of the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals*, the WHO recommit itself to providing access to affordable essential medicines in developing countries. To achieve this, the WHO must hold pharmaceutical companies accountable for the rising high price of medicines and demand greater transparency about the cost of research and development.

One of the greatest barriers in providing access is the high price of medicines. The cost of the newest drugs for the treatment of cancer now exceed \$150,000 a year, and access is extremely unequal across the world.

The justification for the high prices is typically, if not always, based upon claims by pharmaceutical companies that high prices are necessary to reward the outlays and risks for research and development.

The evidence to substantiate these claims, however, is often lacking, and/or controlled by drug company funded researchers and research centers. There is also only limited information on other economic variables, such as drug prices, revenues, per patient costs of clinical trials, and the role of government subsidies for R&D, such as tax credits and research grants.

Several U.S. states, such as California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon and Pennsylvania are considering legislation to require pharmaceutical companies to disclose R&D costs, subsidies from government, as well as other issues.

KEI asks that the WHO convene a meeting to address two issues.

First, what types of economic information should governments require pharmaceutical companies to disclose? This data on R&D costs, research subsidies, prices and sales should complement other data on the safety and efficacy of products.

Second, there is a need to identify the types of economic data should be collected and analyzed by the new global observatory for health R&D the WHO is about to create.

This is not only our view. The New York Times editorial from May 5, 2015, titled “Runaway Drug Prices,” endorsed such legislation, noting that “surely the public would benefit from increased transparency that might deter the worst abuses.”¹

If the WHO is expected to play a role in curbing the high cost of medicines, it needs to have a strong basis of evidence and demand greater transparency from the pharmaceutical industry.

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/opinion/runaway-drug-prices.html>