

Sir Mark Oliphant Conferences 2008: Frontiers of Science &
Technology

Vaccine and Immunotherapy Technologies

The Shine Dome, Canberra, Australia | 9–11 April 2008

MEDIA RELEASE

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MILLIONS OF CHILDREN SAVED

Millions of children's lives have been spared as result of a successful worldwide campaign to boost vaccination against the six most common diseases.

Eminent medical scientist Sir Gustav Nossal will tell the Vaccine and Immunotherapy Technologies Conference in Canberra today that while 138 million more children have received vaccines, there is still much to be done to spread immunity to disease through the global population.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) fund had been dynamically influenced by involvement of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as the donations of millions of ordinary people in countries such as Australia, Sir Gustav said.

“I was deeply moved to hear Bill Gates describe his involvement in GAVI as the best investment he had ever made. From the founder of Microsoft, that is a truly remarkable statement.”

However Sir Gustav warned that, despite the generosity of wealthy philanthropists and ordinary citizens, governments the world over had been slack in following through on their commitments to health aid and the Millennium Development Goals and needed their ‘hands held to the flame’.

“We estimate that 2.3 million deaths a year have been prevented by the increase in vaccination levels, yet wealthy countries such as the G8 continue to content themselves with largely symbolic gestures.”

Measles deaths had fallen by 60 per cent since the vaccination campaign was stepped up, and the aim was to cut them by 90 per cent by 2010, he said.

Apart from vaccination there had also been significant progress in delivering advanced anti-AIDS drugs to more than 2 million Africans a year – a feat which many had claimed was impossible, Sir Gustav said. “However, it should be seven million,” he added.

Global resources for fighting AIDS, TB and malaria now totalled \$US8 billion a year – but should be several times more than this, he said. Already a promising vaccine for malaria was entering trials and there were plans for a global effort on HIV vaccines to pick the best from the nine most promising approaches.

At the same time there were very promising vaccines for acute respiratory disease, diarrhoeal disease and meningitis in development. However a further \$20 billion was needed to mass produce them for distribution to the regions of greatest need.

“The lesson from GAVI and the Gates Foundation experience is that, with real money you can make a real difference.

“After all we are only talking about the price of a couple of jet fighters. That’s all you need to save several million lives,” Sir Gustav said.

The Sir Mark Oliphant Conference on Vaccine and Immunotherapy Technologies is taking place at the Shine Dome, Canberra from April 9-11, 2008.

The Conference is hosted by Australian Academy of Science (AAS) and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) and sponsored by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR).

Media are welcome to attend and interview participants.

More information:

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