

**Joint News Release WHO/FIND/8
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FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATIVE NEW DIAGNOSTICS AND W.H.O. COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE DIAGNOSIS OF SLEEPING SICKNESS WITH A GATES FOUNDATION GRANT

Geneva - The Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and the World Health Organization (WHO), with a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, today announced that they will begin work on the development and evaluation of new diagnostic tests for human African trypanosomiasis, also known as sleeping sickness.

African sleeping sickness, a major public health threat in sub-Saharan Africa, spreads among people bitten by the tsetse fly and is fatal unless treated. Because early-stage infection produces few symptoms, it is thought that only 10% of patients with the disease are accurately diagnosed. FIND and the World Health Organization will collaborate in seeking to identify, test and implement diagnostics that will increase the likelihood of early detection of HAT and the opportunity for treatment.

“The spread of human African trypanosomiasis has reached epidemic proportions in regions of Africa. There is clearly a great need for a simple, accurate and cost-effective way to diagnose this disease so that it can be better treated and controlled,” said Dr Giorgio Roscigno, CEO of FIND. “FIND is committed to identifying and implementing diagnostics for infectious diseases, and we look forward to securing partnerships and initiating field testing.”

“Existing diagnostics for sleeping sickness are difficult to implement in remote, impoverished settings,” said Dr Jean Jannin and Dr Pere Simarro, from the Neglected Tropical Diseases Control Department of the World Health Organization. “We look forward to working with FIND to advance new diagnostic tests that could revolutionize human African trypanosomiasis control.”

“Developing point-of-care tests to direct sleeping sickness treatment will greatly simplify patient care, allowing for early case detection, simpler and safer treatment, and higher rates of cure that will improve disease management and could lead to the elimination of the disease as a public health problem,” said Thomas Brewer, M.D., senior program officer, Infectious Diseases division, Global Health Program, at the Gates Foundation.

Currently, diagnosis of sleeping sickness is made by serologic examinations followed by microscopy, which is laborious, insensitive and costly. FIND’s and WHO’s efforts will be focused on developing tools that will be simple to use and effective in the remote field conditions that exist where it is most prevalent. In addition to developing appropriate diagnostic technologies, the objectives of the programme include establishing field research sites for clinical studies and evaluating prototype products.

More About Human African Trypanosomiasis:

Human African trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness, is a major threat for public health in sub-Saharan Africa, with 100% fatality in untreated cases. The initial symptoms include a low-grade fever, pain in the joints and itchy skin. After a period of time, the parasites carrying the disease enter the brain, often resulting in hallucinations and unpredictable, disruptive behaviour. At this later stage, the infected individual experiences excruciating pain and eventually lapses into a coma before dying. The disease is endemic in 36 African countries. Considering the achievements made in the area of control of the disease, leading to a reduction of new cases reported, it is now considered that the elimination of the disease as a public health problem is feasible. It is estimated that around 70 000 people are currently infected.

About FIND:

The Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) was launched at the World Health Assembly in May 2003 as a non-profit Swiss foundation based in Geneva. Its purpose is to support and promote the health of people in developing countries by sponsoring the development and introduction of new but affordable diagnostic products for infectious diseases. FIND currently has established collaborations with a number of leading public and private organizations for the development of diagnostics for tuberculosis. For more information, please visit www.finddiagnostics.org.

About WHO:

The World Health Organization is the United Nations specialized agency for health. WHO's objective, as set out in its Constitution, is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. Health is defined in WHO's Constitution as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation:

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to promote greater equity in four areas: global health, education, public libraries, and support for at-risk families in Washington state and Oregon. The Seattle-based foundation joins local, national, and international partners to ensure that advances in these areas reach those who need them most. To date, the foundation has committed more than US\$ 3.6 billion in global health grants to organizations worldwide. The foundation is co-chaired by William H. Gates Sr. and Patty Stonesifer.

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