Statement on World TB Day

By

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We are commemorating World TB day this year at a time of new and familiar challenges, promising advances and setbacks in the fight against an ancient disease.

It has been more than 130 years since the 1882 discovery of the bacteria that causes tuberculosis and yet TB remains the world’s second leading infectious killer, just behind HIV/AIDS. This day commemorates the ongoing research that may offer prospects of faster cures, newly approved drugs that offer hope to those whose disease is resistant to older medicines, and new diagnostic tools that offer chances to reach those whose disease has gone undiagnosed. But these advances are far from adequate, and also remain inaccessible to most of the people who need them. Tuberculosis continues to take nearly two million lives every year and remains the leading cause of death for people with HIV. Drug resistant strains of disease continue to spread in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia. A vaccine to prevent TB in adults as well as children is still urgently needed.

Fragile and fragmented health systems in high-burden, low-resource settings leave cases undetected, leading to high mortality and emerging drug resistance. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa that began more than a year ago highlighted these common gaps, showing the far-reaching consequences of broken and missing health systems. This is not news to the United States TB treatment community, which has watched as the proportion of TB patients born outside the US approaches 70 percent.

At the same time, in its response to Ebola the world showed what it could do, with recognition and determination to reverse the trajectory of an infectious pandemic. We have seen that research and development that lay dormant can be accelerated when need is clear. And we have seen that when communities have the resources needed to fight an infectious disease a great deal can be accomplished.

It is our hope this World TB Day that the momentum that has put answers to TB within reach will gain impetus, and that this country will continue to lead the way with robustly funded research, development and programming to defeat TB worldwide.

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