

## Conclusions

“If preventable, why not prevented?” This question was posed by King Edward VII when visiting a tuberculosis sanatorium several decades before the discovery of anti-tuberculosis drugs. It is a question that should rightly challenge the conscience of the world community today. Tuberculosis is among the most effective and cost effective of all diseases to treat yet it has been declared a global emergency. Clearly something is radically wrong with either the available therapy, the way in which it is administered or, more likely, the extent of interest, care, compassion and altruism shown by the wealthier nations — in which a mere 5% of cases of tuberculosis and 2% of deaths due to it occur — to those where the greatest burden of the disease falls. It is tempting for those in the industrialised countries to say ‘tuberculosis is not our problem’, but if potentially untreatable multidrug resistant forms of the disease continue to spread, and if HIV-related tuberculosis devastates the economies of the developing world, the global community will learn too late that it is everyone’s problem. The WHO has stated that if it received funding equivalent to the cost of one jet fighter annually for ten years, the incidence of tuberculosis worldwide could be halved.

Obviously, the fight against tuberculosis would be greatly aided by the introduction of novel control measures, such as highly-effective vaccines and immunotherapeutic agents and improved diagnostic tests. However, we cannot wait for these innovations: there is a huge burden of unnecessary suffering to be addressed now, and this will take a much greater effort than we, as a global community, appear to be willing to make. It is worth bearing in mind the words of Dr. Arata Kochi, Manager of the World Health Organization Global Tuberculosis Programme: “The growing tuberculosis epidemic is no longer an emergency only for those who care about health, but for those who care about justice”, and also the words of King Solomon (Proverbs 12:28): “Along the way of justice there is life.”

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