2018 – A year full of great achievements thanks to strong partnerships

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Dear colleagues and friends of the Novartis Foundation,

As we come to the end of 2018, it is with great pleasure that I highlight some of our achievements and results, thanks to our strong partners and Novartis Foundation teams.

Our programs reached approximately 9.5 million people - more than in previous years. The stories behind these numbers make everything worthwhile: families in rural Ghana accessing better healthcare thanks to telemedicine, people avoiding leprosy infection with Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, patients getting high blood pressure under control and populations made more aware about the dangers of high blood pressure and ways to avoid or control it. Most exciting is how our innovative healthcare programs have become integrated into national health strategies, helping shape health policy, thereby multiplying our impact.

Accelerating progress toward a world without leprosy

We have made good progress in our fight against leprosy:

- Most important was the launch of the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy – bringing together all our partners in the leprosy community to align behind a new and coordinated approach to achieving a leprosy-free world
- Our new partnership with Microsoft aims to develop an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled Digital Health tool to aid early leprosy detection, and we just enrolled the first patient in a study with Fiocruz in Brazil to capture leprosy images
- The World Health Organization incorporated our leprosy post-exposure prophylaxis program strategy into the global guidelines for leprosy prevention

Innovating health service delivery

Today’s global health challenges are unprecedented, with most low- and middle-income countries facing a dual burden of infectious and noncommunicable diseases. This demands that we reimagine the way healthcare is organized and delivered. The Novartis Foundation set out some years ago to pioneer new ways to prevent, detect and manage hypertension. As ample evidence shows that timely treatment of hypertension can avoid complications such as heart disease, stroke or kidney failure, addressing high blood pressure can save millions of lives.

And I am truly proud of how models for reengineering hypertension care that we pioneered together with our partners have proven successful and are now integrated into health policy!
• The community-based hypertension improvement program (ComHIP) in Ghana brought healthcare closer to the community, empowering shopkeepers to measure blood pressure and refer people who need it to the health providers. It doubled hypertension control rates and featured in the Access to Medicine Index as best innovative practice! The Ghana Health Service has integrated the guidelines and training curriculum into the national primary healthcare system. Similar results were achieved in the Community for Healthy Hearts (CH2) program in Ho Chi Minh City, with Vietnam health authorities from the General Department of Preventive Medicine integrating the program into their policy and transferring the model to Hanoi.

• Our urban health initiative to improve cardiovascular health, Better Hearts Better Cities, reached 1.3 million people this year in Dakar, Senegal; São Paulo, Brazil; and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Our new partner, the Syngenta Foundation, is supporting the multisector approach by investigating how to improving availability of healthy food in Dakar. In São Paulo, there has been exceptional community support, for example from the Samba School and Corinthians Football Club, as well as financial and strategic support from our new partner Associação Samaritano. In Ulaanbaatar, the program has shaped policy to improve affordability and access to treatments, and incentivize quality outcomes for patients.

• The Healthy Schools for Healthy Communities initiative in South Africa has developed an innovative teaching tool titled KaziKids, which will roll out to project schools early next year.

Demonstrating the power of digital health

• In most of our work, digital health is the enabler and glue to link patients to the care they need. In addition, as co-chair of the Broadband Commission Working Group on Digital Health, we presented our latest report, ‘The Promise of Digital Health for addressing NCDs’, at the UN General Assembly, showcasing tangible solutions that can be implemented by governments and other policy makers.

• The Ghanaian government has continued to integrate and scale its Telemedicine services within six regions, based on our initial model in Amansie West. The services are now available to about 7 million people! We have developed a digital implementation toolkit for this model, and hope many other governments will apply it and follow the roadmap to scale that was applied in Ghana.

Innovative and inspirational partnerships

This year has seen so many of our programs come to fruition and reach scale, and I want to thank all of our colleagues and partners for making this happen. It would not have been possible without the fantastic collaboration, trusted partnerships and the outstanding dedication of our team.

Next year marks the 40th anniversary of the Novartis Foundation. While we are proud of the transformational impact on people and patients, we will not rest and continue to evolve our work to help address the most pressing health issues and look forward to continuing working with you.

My very best wishes to you all for the holiday season and a wonderful new year!

Ann Aerts


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