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New progress in the fight against illnesses linked to poverty

by Alain Jourdan

Research

The Swiss foundation FIND promotes innovation in the field of new diagnostics

“What has happened since our creation five years ago is a cause for joy”, confides Dr. Giorgio Roscigno, Director General of the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND). Launched during a World Health Organization (WHO) meeting in 2003 with an initial donation from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, FIND has become an influential agent in the fight against diseases linked to poverty.

FIND has played a part in the development of a test for tuberculosis (TB) and the identification of patients carrying multi-resistant (MDR) strains of TB and those extremely-resistant (XDR) to treatment. These cases have recently been rising dramatically in various regions of the world. The exact reach of this disease remains uncertain, as only a few countries are equipped with adequate means of diagnosing it.

“In Switzerland, it is quite easy to receive a diagnostic test in a hospital. In most developing countries that is not the case. Only 10% of sick people have access to a diagnosis”, states Dr. Roscigno.

FIND has set itself a mission: to accelerate the development and access to new diagnostic tests that are precise, affordable and fast, in regions with low resources. “This is a model that should inspire everyone involved in research,” said Dr. Mario Raviglione, Director of Stop TB at WHO. “These discoveries are important for the morale of those who have been working for years with no innovation,” he says enthusiastically. He then adds: “The fruits of our research need to move very quickly from Northern laboratories into policy and implementation in countries in the South, showing that if we work closely together we can find solutions to the problem of controlling tuberculosis.”