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Gates Invests in Diagnostics

By Martin Enserink

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has donated \$30 million to help develop better diagnostic tests for some of the world's most deadly diseases. The money will be distributed through the new Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) in Geneva, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases.

The lack of fast and accurate diagnostic tests bedevils efforts to control many infectious diseases, especially in developing countries. For instance, the current sputum test for tuberculosis--FIND's first target--is over a century old, time-consuming, and not very reliable. FIND, led by Giorgio Roscigno, a former development director at the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development in New York City, is hoping to develop the science behind new tests and help them reach the market by working with industry, WHO, and others.

"It's a great initiative," says Carol Nacy, CEO of Sequella, a Rockville, Maryland, company specializing in new tools to fight TB. "We need better diagnostics really badly."