



A window of opportunity

→ Kathy Redmond ■ EDITOR

Millions of people will die unnecessarily unless a massive effort is made to tackle the worsening global cancer epidemic. But the investment in cancer control that is so desperately needed, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, will not happen until cancer control becomes a development priority. The momentum generated by the launch of the World Cancer Declaration in Geneva this August offers an opportunity for galvanising people into action that we cannot afford to squander.

The failure of health organisations to grasp the seriousness of the situation is graphically illustrated by an article in *The Lancet* (27 September), which flagged up the deadly disconnect between what needs to be done according to public health evidence and the priorities of the largest international health-care donors – the World Bank, the US Government, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS.

These donors have a huge influence over national health priority setting and resource allocation, particularly in countries that are dependent on aid – in some sub-Saharan states, for instance, 40%–60% of national health-care expenditure comes from donations. But the failure to match fund allocation to needs means that, while cancer kills more people than AIDS, TB and malaria com-

bined, in 2005 the biggest international health donors allocated only 2% of funds to chronic diseases. This represents about \$3.2 per death, compared to HIV/AIDS, which received more than \$1000 per death.

Only the World Bank invests in long-term initiatives to support improvements in health systems as a whole – an approach that can help improve outcomes for all diseases, not just a select few.

The biggest problem we face in securing greater investment in cancer initiatives is that most donor agencies set their priorities based on the Millennium Development Goals, which give barely a passing reference to reducing the burden of chronic diseases. The World Cancer Declaration sets out to remedy this disastrous oversight, calling for cancer to be put squarely on the development agenda and for cancer control policies to be given priority as a key strand of investment in a country's economic and social wellbeing. The cancer community now needs to embrace this Declaration and put pressure on governments, NGOs and leading donor agencies to develop strategies to meet the 11 targets outlined within the next 12 years.

Establishing a Global Fund for Cancer, comparable to the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, would also send out a clear message that cancer is a key global health threat and provide valuable resources to kick-start projects in countries in greatest need.

The World Cancer Declaration is supported by almost 500 international cancer organisations and 3,500 individuals. To read the Declaration and add your support, visit <http://tiny.cc/worldcancerdeclaration>