

## **Internationally - Public Health and Innovation**

A key function of the Alliance of Health Disparities (AHD) is to engage in shaping healthcare policy that affects racial and ethnic minorities. The Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG ) Hearing on public health, innovation and intellectual property is clearly in line with our mission. At issue are the alternatives being proposed to the current private sector innovation model.

We all believe that innovation in health care, particularly medicines, is very important to the health and well being of all human beings. As advocates, we also believe that the medications and vaccines we now have to treat and prevent disease are attributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of the current research and development (R & D) and innovation system. Yet there is a movement to curb private sector innovation that has been responsible for the development of drugs and vaccines used to successfully treat the greatest percentage of diseases worldwide.

We understand that governments are focused on costs, considering the looming surge of noncommunicable diseases, and that they are preparing to deal with the associated cost pressures. We are concerned that as a cost cutting mechanism, research in conditions perceived valuable by consumers, would not be perceived as valuable by government. Private firms, in general, are thought to be better informed about the potential value of innovations to patients and providers and when directing research it is probable that the kinds of innovations that consumers would find useful would not be funded as the research entity would not place the same value on the need as would the consumer.

As nurses and patient advocates, we know that safe, new drugs contribute to the increased productivity and quality of life of patients/consumers. We also know that bacteria and viruses cannot wait for infrastructures to develop and investments to be made as the economic circumstances of individual countries can diverge over time. Even in the United States today, where notable progress in the overall health of its citizens has occurred, there are still continuing health disparities in the occurrences of illnesses, conditions and deaths experienced by African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Asians and Pacific Islanders, compared to the Caucasian population.

It wasn't too long ago that when a patient was diagnosed with cancer or HIV/AIDS it was a death sentence. A diagnosis of mental illness was a sentence to the more costly long term institution. Although the private system is not a perfect one, it has been one which has given us more options for prevention and treatment of diseases than we ever imagined. We caution the promotion of alternatives not thought to stifle innovation; there is sufficient information to the contrary and support public and private initiatives which increase overall R & D incentives.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Reyes MPA, BSN, RN  
President  
Alliance of Health Disparities  
[alliance\\_health\\_disparities@q.com](mailto:alliance_health_disparities@q.com);  
[www.allianceofhealthdisparities.org](http://www.allianceofhealthdisparities.org)