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Neglected tropical diseases: Road to control, elimination and eradication by 2020

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Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of bacterial, parasitic and viral diseases that proliferate in tropical and subtropical environments through 149 countries. Currently, more than 1.4 billion people living in Africa, America and Asia are affected by at least 1 of the 17 NTDs recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO). NTDs are called neglected because they have been largely wiped out of the most developed areas, but they have persisted in the poorest and most marginalized societies, where inadequate sanitation due to the lack of clean water and poor hygiene, frequent contact with vectors and reservoirs and inadequate healthcare services prevail. If left untreated, NTDs may cause substantial illness and tremendous physical and emotional suffering, hampering children from attending to school and reducing adults economic productivity. As a result, families and communities become trapped in a cycle of disease and poverty. Fortunately, NTDs can be effectively managed if proper measures are implemented. While they have been around for centuries, the team effort to fight them is brand new. In 2011, the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases drew a roadmap for control, elimination and eradication for the 2012-2020 periods and in 2012, a community of partners endorsed the London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases to commit themselves to enhance a better and accelerated response by working in alliance. As we consider both events as an historic set point to change the course of NTDs and as we find ourselves at half of the way of the planned period, it is time to analyze where do we stand on the roadmap and what areas of improvement should be reinforced. We still can achieve targets, but additional commitment is needed and each health professional should play its role to reach those left behind.

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