

SUNY professor indexes pharma companies' impact



Nicole Hassoun. | YouTube

By NIDHI PRAKASH

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A SUNY college professor who developed an index ranking the world's largest pharmaceutical companies according to their impact on global diseases is presenting the project today at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

Professor Nicole Hassoun, an associate professor of philosophy at Binghamton University, is at the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) headquarters to launch the index, which she hopes will influence pharmaceutical companies and legislators to invest more in treatments for malaria, tuberculosis, and H.I.V./AIDS.

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“This is the first rigorous evaluation of actual amount of death and disability the companies’ drugs are alleviating, and it can hopefully motivate these pharmaceutical companies to do more to address these needs,” Hassoun told

The [Global Health Impact Index](#) assesses the companies on the need and effectiveness of their drugs, and the number of people who can access the drugs. The index takes into account the findings of the [Global Burden of Disease study](#) from Seattle’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, which analyzed the needs for treatments globally between 1990-2013.

Ultimately, the index aims to calculate how much impact the companies have on preventing deaths and disabilities from the three diseases worldwide. The amount that pharmaceutical companies spend on treatments for diseases that largely affect poorer nations has come into focus lately in the wake of the Ebola crisis.

“We would like it to guide health care policy and incentivize new innovations that will help extend access to essential medicines around the world,” Hassoun said. “I do think that corporations have human rights responsibilities to

address the access to medicines issues, along with governments and international organizations.”

Hassoun’s project, which has been in the works for five to six years, got its start through a \$10,000 grant from Binghamton University, along with smaller grants including one from Carnegie-Mellon University. Hassoun said part of the launch at the W.H.O. headquarters would involve trying to garner more funding for the project.

The index, which will be made publicly available by the W.H.O., shows that Sanofi, Novartis and Pfizer are at the top of the index, while Eli Lilly, Kyorin Pharmaceuticals and Bayer Healthcare are at the bottom.

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A spokesperson for Eli Lilly said the company does not manufacture drugs for any of the diseases included in the index. “But Lilly continues to play a leading role in addressing many global health issues—including tuberculosis—that wouldn’t show up in Global Health Impact Index,” said David Marbaugh, communications director for Corporate Responsibility at Eli Lilly. “Our largest philanthropic effort addresses multidrug-resistant TB through the [Lilly MDR-TB Partnership](#). Through this innovative partnership, we have committed more than \$170 million.”

Marbaugh said the company’s investment includes giving away the trademarks and technology to make two drugs used in the treatment of multi drug resistant tuberculosis, the [Lilly TB Drug Discovery Partnership](#) which focuses on finding new tuberculosis drugs, and training health workers in areas hard hit by the disease.

Officials from Kyorin Pharmaceuticals could not be reached for comment, while a Bayer Healthcare spokesman responded but did not provide a comment.

Hassoun said tools exist to track company policies on drug accessibility—specifically, the Gates Foundation’s [Access to Medicines Index](#)—but that her system could be used in conjunction with other databases to arrive at a more well-rounded picture of the kind of impact companies can have on public health globally.

“If you look at it and compare it to the Access to Medicines Index, or other measures of what kinds of policies that the companies have in place, so you might be able to figure out what is it that causes some companies to have a

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