

OPINION

Marin Voice: Tuberculosis is still a serious threat around the world



Irish rock band U2 singer Bono, second left, French fashion designer Olivier Rousteing, French President Emmanuel Macron, fourth left, and US Microsoft founder, Co-Chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bill Gates, right, pose for a family picture at Lyon's city hall, central France, Wednesday Oct. 9, 2019, before the funding conference of Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. (Ludovic Marin, Pool via AP)

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In 1965 I worked in a Tuberculosis unit in a county hospital in New York City and contracted TB disease but fortunately not TB infection. This simply means that the Tuberculosis bacterium lies dormant (latent) inside my body ready to become active should I have any major alteration in my health.

One third of the world's population carries the bacteria, like I do, and 35% of these individuals have another health issue that increase the risk of progression from latent to active TB disease. Many HIV infected people in Africa and Asia contract and die from Tuberculosis well before HIV ravishes their bodies because their immune compromised systems are unable to fight off the world's most infectious microbe.

There are an estimated 9 million new cases of Tuberculosis every year: it kills 1.5 million people and many people have drug resistant forms, making it difficult to treat and eradicate. It generally attacks the lungs and easily spreads when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Sadly, there have been hardly any new drugs to treat TB in the last 20 years, making it easier for the microbe to become resistant to all the current TB regimens.

Despite the high mortality rate of TB and the lack of new drugs, there is hope. Since 2004 there has been a 29% decrease in the death rate from TB in countries where the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria has invested resources. This proves that TB can be managed and in many cases contained.

The Global Fund is a public-private partnership between governments, civil society, the private sector (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and people affected by the disease. The Global Fund does not administer programs, but rather provides grants to individuals, organizations and government agencies in affected countries that submit qualified grant proposals, thus developing local capacity and control for these lifesaving programs.

Presently, 125 countries are participating with the Global Fund in TB treatment and elimination projects.

The Global Fund operates with a high degree of transparency in all of its work including applications for funding — you can track every dollar on their website. And its oversight ensures a minimum of waste and corruption because programs must demonstrate effectiveness, stay within their projected budgets and stand up to rigorous audits or find their funding is not renewed.

The Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria can make a huge difference for millions of people all over the globe especially in poor and developing countries. It also makes us safer at home by addressing diseases like TB at its source rather than letting it travel around the globe. Last year alone there were 9,229 new cases of TB in the United States, which was the second time in 23 years we have seen an increase in new TB infections.

A large percentage of these individuals were not born in the United States, meaning that they either contacted the disease in their home countries and the bacteria remained dormant sometimes for decades or were exposed to an infected individual in the US and because of their tenuous health became infective and exposed sometimes hundreds of people to TB.

The United States is the major donor to the Global Fund. We should continue our leadership role and encourage other countries to step up to the plate. An additional \$14 billion is needed now for Global Fund to continue its lifesaving work.

You can help. Ask that our representatives and senators that speak to other members of Congress, and President Donald Trump right away and urge them to support the U.S. maintaining its commitment to supply one third of the overall money needed for the Global Fund during this week's meeting in Lyon, France.

Gail Dolson, of Corte Madera, is a nurse practitioner and a member of Results, a citizen activist/advocacy group committed to the eradication of poverty globally.