

## Novartis executive to join Gates foundation

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A top executive at Novartis is to join the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, cementing strong co-operation between leading pharmaceuticals companies and the world's largest philanthropic organisation.

Trevor Mundel, 51, who heads of global development at the Swiss-based drug manufacturer, will in December take over as head of global health at the Seattle-based Gates Foundation, responsible for its \$1.5bn annual budget, funding the development of new drugs, vaccines and diagnostics.

The decision is likely to herald fresh support for the drug companies' commitment to tough intellectual property laws and support further Gates funding of their research, including for Novartis, which is already one of the most active in researching drugs and vaccines for diseases of the developing world.

However, it may antagonise some health advocates who have criticised patents - fiercely defended by drug companies - as providing a barrier to affordable access to medicines for the poor. Novartis has been in the forefront of the clash, as it gears up for a fresh defence of its patents in India for Glivec, a costly cancer drug.

Tido von Schoen-Angerer, director of Medecins sans Frontieres' essential medicines campaign, said: 'It is worrisome to see yet another industry executive in this powerful global health position. While he brings important skills to the Gates Foundation's product development work, his new role is broader and includes shaping access and other health policies. The foundation will likely alienate many in the global health community, given Novartis's relentless attacks on the Indian patent system to weaken access to affordable medicines.'

Mr Mundel becomes the second incumbent at the Gates Foundation with a background in the pharmaceuticals sector following Tachi Yamada, the former head of research at GlaxoSmithKline, who stepped down from his role as head of global health in June after five years.

Novartis is one of the drug companies with the most relevant experience for the Gates Foundation. It sells at cost large quantities of Coartem, the pioneering and highly effective malaria treatment, and donates drugs for other illnesses, including leprosy.

Mr Mundel said he had had little direct experience on drugs for the poor, stressing instead his past work on medicines, including Gilenya for multiple sclerosis and Ilaris for a rare inflammatory disease. But he highlighted his work in operating a research centre in Hyderabad in India.

'The Gates Foundation has a somewhat pharmaceutical [industry] problem or opportunity: a large portfolio of projects,' he said. 'You have to accept there will be a certain attrition, find a way to focus your resources and [impose] data-driven milestones.'

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