KEY RESULTS OF THE PLENARY TABLE

"EXPANDING GLOBAL ACCESS TO INNOVATIVE MEDICAL THERAPIES"

Panellists: Jennifer Adair (Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, US), Alain Huriez (Abdio Partners, FR), Jimi Olaghere (ICER, US), Christof von Kalle (Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Berlin Institute of Health (BIH), DE), Beate Kampmann (Moderation)(Charité Center for Global Health, DE)

Despite significant advancements in medical therapies, such as gene therapy and cell-based treatments, stark inequalities persist in global health systems, leaving many patients without access to even minimal care. Innovative therapies hold unprecedented potential to address chronic and life-threatening diseases, but geographical barriers, high costs, and limited eligibility criteria prevent many patients from benefiting from these breakthroughs.

Gene therapy is revolutionising the treatment of genetic diseases by addressing root causes at the molecular level. For instance, sickle cell disease, which affects over seven million people worldwide, can now be effectively treated through gene editing techniques. Patient advocate Jimi Olaghere shared his transformative journey from living in constant fear and pain due to sickle cell disease to experiencing a dramatically improved quality of life after participating in a gene therapy clinical trial. He highlighted several barriers he faced, including a lack of information from healthcare providers about available treatments, discouragement from his own doctors, restrictive clinical trial eligibility criteria, and the exorbitant cost of therapy. Olaghere called for re-evaluation of clinical trial criteria, increased patient education, and efforts to make treatments more affordable and accessible globally.

THE EXPERT PANEL ARTICULATES THE FOLLOWING CALLS TO ACTION:

Simplify manufacturing and reduce costs.

1 — Invest in innovative technologies and platforms that streamline the production of gene therapies, reducing costs and making treatments more accessible to a broader patient population.

Foster global collaboration and standardisation.

2 — Encourage collaboration among researchers, industry, and policymakers across countries to develop global standards for therapy development. The use of alternative (e. g. digital) methods to bring stakeholders together can enhance global knowledge sharing, equitable access, and support for the implementation of gene therapies worldwide.

Increase patient education and advocacy.

3 — Invest in educational initiatives to improve patient literacy about gene therapies, demystify the treatments, and empower patients to advocate for their health care options.

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Bridge the gap between research and patient care.

4 — Support efforts to translate scientific discoveries into practical treatments. By addressing barriers that limit clinical trial participation, such as restrictive eligibility criteria and lack of physician awareness, more patients can access innovative therapies.

Address inequities at the source.

5 — Focus on treating diseases at their epicentres, particularly in regions with the highest disease burden. Investing in local infrastructure, capacity building, and culturally sensitive approaches can ensure equitable access and take into account the cultural and historical contexts of affected populations.

This event is supported by Berlin Institute of Health at Charité (BIH) and assembled in the framework of the Falling Walls Science Summit 2024 in Berlin. The Falling Walls Science Summit is a leading international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral forum for scientific breakthroughs. It commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and aims to promote dialogue between science and society.

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