



# Taking action to improve global access to diabetes treatment

Recently, considerable attention has been paid to access to medicines. Public health policy debates have largely focused on patents as the main barrier to access to treatment, blaming them for the high costs of medicines. Much of this controversy has addressed treatments for communicable diseases, *eg* HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Less attention has been paid to drugs for non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, although this group represents the leading cause of death worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of focusing solely on access to medicines, attention should be paid to access to treatment. Proper care for people with chronic diseases requires more than access to a supply of medicine. Other factors affect patient care and outcomes, including the availability of diagnostic tools and the presence of trained healthcare workers. This process must take place in a health system with the appropriate infrastructure required to guarantee continued supply of medicines and continuing care for chronic conditions. A positive policy and the involvement of the family and community are also necessary.<sup>2</sup>

## Insulin For Life

Insulin For Life (IFL) collects and distributes insulin and other diabetes supplies that would otherwise be wasted. These are sent as a result of emergencies, and also on an ongoing, sustainable basis to recognised organisations and with agreed monitoring systems. IFL is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit company registered in the state of Victoria, Australia, which was established in 1999. It evolved from the 20-year programme at the International Diabetes Institute, Australia. Its objectives are:

- To collect and donate insulin, syringes, test strips and other supplies in urgent situations
- To donate supplies to several countries and diabetes associations continually, based on equality of access
- To encourage the development of similar programmes elsewhere
- To help develop and implement sustainable improvements in insulin supply in countries in need.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1986, the IFL Australian centre has donated 1 682 010ml of insulin, 703 660 blood glucose test strips, 1.6 million syringes, glucose monitors, insulin pens and needles, lancets and lancing devices, and other items. These have been donated to 75 countries, in all seven IDF regions, and are valued at a total of US\$6 106 863. This volume of insulin can keep 45 000 people alive for three months, based on 150ml required per year per person.

In Europe, the IFL model has been adopted by Insulin Zum Leben (Germany and Austria) and the Insulin Dependent Diabetes Trust (UK). Volumes being distributed are increasing, and there is great potential for the further growth of the number of independent and affiliated collection and distribution centres.<sup>3</sup>

## People with diabetes cycling for people with diabetes

Inspired by the work of IFL and FEND's 14th annual conference, entitled 'Declarations, Recommendations, Resolutions, Action!',<sup>4</sup> Claudia Leippert, a diabetes nurse specialist from Austria, took on the initiative to organise a promotional activity to support IFL. Between 7 and 22 September, eight to 10 people from Germany and Austria will cycle 920km, starting at the source of the Danube and finishing in Vienna. The group will arrive on the eve of FEND's 2009 Conference on 25–26 September.

By inviting people with diabetes and their caregivers, the cyclists aim to be accompanied by many others who support them during part of the route and cycle together as a 'peloton'. In four places along the route – two in Germany and two in Austria – events are planned to inform people about the work of IFL and to raise financial support to cover costs. The event is sponsored by Lilly Germany, Bayer Diabetes Care, Becton Dickinson, D. Klonoff, Diabetes Technology Management USA, Hardy's Bike Shop Reutlingen, Medtronic Minimed, Roche Diagnostics, and sanofi-aventis. Further information is available at: [www.diabetes-austria.com](http://www.diabetes-austria.com).

IFL, the annual FEND conference and the cycling event are all examples of international collaborative activities that aim to improve the well-being of people with diabetes. There is much more room for such initiatives and little room for complacency.

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## References

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