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World Health Organization  
Dr Margaret Chan  
Director-General  
20 avenue Appia  
1211 Genève, Suisse

7 June 2007

Dear Dr Chan,

A recent publication in the Lancet has raised concerns about the methods used by WHO to develop and update recommendations or guidelines. Established methods for making recommendations are apparently not routinely used, and WHO recommendations appear to be based more on expert opinions than on critical appraisal of the evidence, which compromise their scientific strength and WHO credibility.

Crucially, WHO reliance on experts makes transparency of conflicts of interest a major concern. Yet WHO rules do not provide for easy access to declarations of conflicts of interest, as it is specified in '*Declaration of interests for WHO experts*': "*Information disclosed on this Form may be made available to persons outside of WHO only when the objectivity of the meeting or work has been questioned such that the Director-General considers disclosure to be in the best interests of the Organization, and then only after consultation with you.*"

The ISDB position is that such obstacle is not consistent with established methods for designing guidelines, and also with transparency requirements mentioned in 'Guidelines for WHO Guidelines'.

Conflicts of interest disclosure should be the rule, not the exception. WHO credibility would be enhanced if the need to question objectivity were removed, and declarations of conflicts of interest were systematically available on WHO websites.

ISDB thank you for addressing these concerns and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully  
ISDB Executive committee

Maria Font

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