



April 23, 2008

Open Letter to AUTM Members

Dear Technology Transfer Officer:

The Association of University Technology Managers has this week called on you to join the organization in standing in the way of progress at the World Health Organization Intergovernmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property (IGWG). AUTM is opposing the exploration of innovative mechanisms that could improve our broken global health system. Although AUTM believes that we have a “very successful system of innovation and tech transfer,” this system is clearly not succeeding for the hundreds of millions of poor people suffering and dying because of policies that impede both innovation for neglected diseases, as well as access to medicines and health interventions.

As a member of AUTM, your office has been asked to sign onto a letter being circulated by the Institute for Policy Innovation (IPI), an anti-access think tank whose message mirrors that of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturing of America (PhRMA) and Biotechnology Industrial Organization (BIO). IPI also refuses to disclose its donors. The letter was written by Tom Giovanetti, an ideologue who thinks that the discussions at the WHO and IGWG constitute “Marxist madness.” (See Policy Bites blog posting of November 8, 2007). While AUTM has long expressed a commitment to access to medicines, it has yet to take concrete action to actually ensure that the poor in the global south have access to medicines developed on university campuses. AUTM is now in fact taking action to oppose an open discussion of policies that could lead to important new approaches to research and development for neglected diseases and access to medicines – many of which have been endorsed by highly respected economists such as Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz.

The success of the IGWG negotiations is crucial to the health of billions of people. The goals of the IGWG negotiations are consistent with the mission of universities to further knowledge and innovation for the global public good. AUTM has a responsibility to uphold this mission, and therefore should not be asking its members to sign on to a document that represents the interests of PhRMA and BIO over and above this central goal of universities. AUTM should rather work constructively to ensure the success of the IGWG negotiations.

We therefore call on you to show your support for the IGWG process by:

- 1) Refusing to sign onto IPI’s letter or remove your name if you have already signed it.
- 2) Demanding that AUTM retract its support of the IPI letter
- 3) Demanding that AUTM take concrete steps to adopt policies regarding the funding and licensing of the fruits of university research that serve the public good and ensure access alongside innovation