

Lessons From Ebola and Zika: The Role of Economic Incentives in Drug Development and Public Health

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ABSTRACT: Public health emergencies are becoming familiar occurrences with dire human and economic consequences. Infectious disease outbreaks have sparked international concerns due to the large number of people impacted and lack of effective strategies to contain these diseases at the time of the outbreaks. In response to political pressure and economic incentives, billions of U.S. dollars have been invested in research for illnesses like HIV/AIDS and influenza. However, very limited resources have been dedicated to Ebola and Zika. To examine the relationship between economic incentives and accessible Ebola and Zika treatments, this paper will analyze timelines of key events during the Ebola and Zika outbreaks and compare them to a timeline of the HIV/AIDS outbreak (a prime case study of disparities in drug availability for the rich vs. the poor). Key events for each disease outbreak include: when the outbreak began when the virus was identified, when the disease began to garner media attention, when a public health emergency was declared, and when treatments became available for the rich and then the poor. These dates are compiled from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports and World Health Organization (WHO) reports for the Zika and Ebola outbreaks; and from AIDS.gov, the website on HIV/AIDS managed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Organized into timelines, this information will reveal key incidents that may have sparked drug development, in addition to lags in treatment accessibility for certain communities.

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