

Expert Panel Discusses Concern on Use of Publicly Funded Knowledge in Medicines Development

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UTRECHT—At a public event at [Utrecht University](#) yesterday, a panel of advocates, researchers and academics called upon the Dutch government to enforce guidelines for [socially responsible licensing of publicly funded knowledge](#). The panel also highlighted the crucial role of universities and research institutions in making innovation socially sustainable.

The private sector has used results of publicly funded research to develop medicines that are subsequently marketed at unaffordable prices. This “undermines the principle of equal access to medicines and, therefore, is threatening public health”, said Ella Weggen, Senior Global Health Advocate at [Wemos](#). Referring to Wemos/SOMOs recently published report “Overpriced. Drugs Developed with Dutch Public Funding”. She added:

“In 2017, approximately €780m of Dutch public funding was spent on biomedical R&D, with a further €55m worth of funding coming from the EU. This should lead to medicines that are affordable and widely accessible—but this is not the case.”

Other recent tools, such as “Ten Principles for Socially Responsible Licensing” by the Netherlands Network of University Medical Centres (NFU), or Health Action International’s (HAI) publication “Guidelines for Socially Responsible Management of Innovation” that was launched at the event stress the importance of licensing in order to guarantee public return on public investment. Licensing can serve as a tool allowing universities and public research institutions to engage in knowledge transfer schemes while retaining some degree of control over developments derived from their projects’ knowledge and data.

Aukje Mantel-Teeuwisse, Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Utrecht University, called on universities to “take responsibility”: “We see many successful public-private collaborations. However, we need to ensure that innovations reach patients in need of medicines in a sustainable way.”

To achieve this, universities and public research institutions must “proactively seek cooperation arrangements with the private sector, which do not involve the privatisation of knowledge through monopolies”, as Jaume Vidal, Senior Policy Advisor at HAI, pointed out. He continued:

“We are encouraged by the set of guidelines for socially responsible licensing put together

by NFU after a wide consultation process with stakeholders to which civil society was able to contribute. We expect the same political will and decisiveness from parliament to make these guidelines not only operational, but enforceable by law.”

Yesterday’s event was organised by Health Action International, Wemos and Utrecht University. The panel discussion involved representatives from NFU, the Utrecht Centre for Affordable Biotherapeutics, Maastricht University and Universities Allied for Essential Medicines - Netherlands.

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