

Plenary Session: Sunday, May 2, 2010

4:00pm – 5:30pm

Welcoming Ceremony and AFMC – AMS J. Wendell Macleod Memorial Lecture

White coats and blue helmets: Canada's strategic role in Global Health

Peter A. Singer, MD, MPH, FRSC

Director McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health and Professor of Medicine University Health Network and University of Toronto

We live in a world where almost 10 m children die before their fifth birthday and where life expectancies in the rich world are double those in some parts of the poor world. Canada's significant strengths – in health research and related life sciences – could be mobilized to produce innovations that address the pressing challenges of the developing world. Canada already has many of the necessary institutions: the International Development Research Centre, the Development Innovation Fund, and the Global Health Research Initiative. There are also important roles that could be played by Canadian universities, industry and by our diaspora. Although these innovations would be focused on the challenges of the developing world, they could also have a significant impact domestically by helping to address a range of shared threats such as chronic disease and H1N1, and some solutions could also find application in our Aboriginal communities. While such a strategy might begin with development, it would quickly reinforce our international competitiveness and trade relations especially with respect to India and China, and also strengthen our approach to diplomacy. It has been half a century since Canada made a truly distinctive global contribution through its foreign policy. In the same way that we once led the world through peacekeeping and the 'blue helmets' of the United Nations, we now have the opportunity to become the leaders using the 'white lab coats' of health and science. Our distinctive new global brand would be innovation – Canada helps developing countries solve their problems using health research and education. We could lead the way and inspire other nations to follow – beginning with the upcoming opportunities of the G8 and G20 meetings and our bid to join the UN Security Council.

