



Tel. direct: +41 22 791 3603  
Fax direct: +41 22 791 4160  
E-mail : saracenob@who.int

In reply please  
refer to: MSD

Your reference:

Dr Elias A. Zerhouni  
Director, National Institutes of Health,  
Office of the Director  
National Institutes of Health (NIH),  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20892  
USA

14 August 2007

Dear Dr Zerhouni,

The World Health Organization, through its Global Campaign to Reduce the Burden of Headache Worldwide, is pleased to endorse the call to the US National Institutes of Health to give earnest consideration, in setting its priorities for future research funding, to the very great humanitarian and socioeconomic burdens imposed by headache disorders throughout the world<sup>1</sup>.

WHO has provided evidence that migraine, on its own, is among the top 20 causes of disability worldwide<sup>2</sup>. The Global Campaign has adduced evidence that other headache disorders account for at least similar burdens, suggesting that headache disorders collectively are in the top 10 causes of disability<sup>3</sup>.

Despite this, WHO has noted that “management of headache disorders everywhere in the world has low priority, which abjectly fails to match headache-related health-care provision and delivery to people’s needs”<sup>4</sup>. In keeping with this, headache disorders currently command only very low priority for research funding.

In its recent statement of public-health priorities, WHO has identified these areas of headache in which research is needed, and can be expected to contribute to reducing the burdens described<sup>4</sup>:

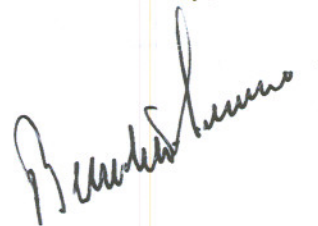
1. basic research that concentrates on elucidating disease mechanisms, particularly those that respond to environmental influences and those with a genetic basis, which will guide the development of new treatments;
2. pharmaceutical research and clinical trials that support the translation of new discoveries into better treatments for people with headache disorders;

cc: Dr Robert E Shapiro, Associate Professor of Neurology, Medical Director, UVM Office of Clinical Trials Research, Given Building C219B, Department of Neurology, College of Medicine, University of Vermont, 89 Beaumont Avenue, Burlington, VT 05405, USA

3. epidemiological research that will establish the scope and scale of headache-related burden of illness around the world, leading to knowledge that will guide appropriate allocation of health-care resources by policy-makers and, at the same time, identifying preventable risk factors for headache disorders;
4. health services research backed by health economic studies that may show, given the prevalence of medication misuse, underuse and overuse, that the reallocation of resources towards improving health-care delivery offers greater benefits for people with headache disorders, by more effectively using treatments already available, than the search for new pharmacological interventions;
5. outcomes research that will guide optimal health-care and its delivery within organized health services.

In all of these areas, WHO believes that increased NIH funding has the potential to bring very large global benefits. This is not only because the practical achievements of NIH-funded research are ultimately available to everyone throughout the world but also, rather more concretely, because NIH is in reality a global research entity supporting research studies performed both within and outside the US. In this sense, the call for increased NIH funding of headache research is more than merely complementary to the goals of the Global Campaign: it directly supports the Global Campaign and its objectives, many of which are unlikely to be achieved within the foreseeable future without substantially enhanced investment in research.

Yours sincerely,



Dr B. Saraceno  
Director  
Department of Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse

<sup>1</sup> Shapiro RE. NIH funding for research on headache disorders: does it matter? *Headache* 2007; **47**: 993-995

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. *The World Health Report 2001*. Geneva: WHO, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Stovner LJ, Hagen K, Jensen R, Katsarava Z, Lipton R, Scher AI, Steiner TJ, Zwart J-A. The global burden of headache: a documentation of headache prevalence and disability worldwide. *Cephalalgia* 2007; **27**: 193-210.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. *Neurological disorders: public health challenges*. Geneva: WHO, 2006.