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Advocate for basic health care

Behind the scenes of the fight against high-profile diseases such as AIDS and malaria, ITM has put just as much effort in championing basic health care in recent decades.

It isn't possible to pinpoint precisely when ITM made basic health care a priority, but when Alma Ata (Kazakhstan) was the stage of a historic health conference on this subject in 1978, the Institute was already heavily involved in the topic. ITM professors Mercenier and Van Baelen were the driving forces behind the congress. Pierre Mercenier even held the pen when the famous Declaration of Alma Ata was put to paper. The embarrassing thing is that 'affordable health care for everyone' is still nothing more than a dream for millions of people.

And still, it is possible. In the 1980s, the Institute started the Kasongo project in East Congo, with young doctors Prof. Bart Criel and Prof. Vincent Debrouwere among the pioneers. A network of easily accessible health centres with nurses with diverse skills was developed in the region. The idea was for the patient to receive long-term follow-up in exchange for a small, one-time monetary contribution. Most problems are resolved by the nurse, but if there is a need for specialised care, the patient goes to the central hospital. Kasongo was a success. For a long time the project was a model for basic health care in developing countries.

Since then ITM has continued to include basic health care in its activities. It also conducts research on the subject. In February 2016, the Institute presented a study, upon the request of the Belgian development cooperation, about the manner in which affordable health care can be achieved for everyone in ten developing countries.