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Corporate power's potential for good – Letter to the editor

From Mr. James B. Russo.

Sir, Peter Dolan's call (March 9) for global companies to focus their unparalleled managerial expertise on the global challenge of HIV/Aids represented much-needed fresh thinking on the most important health threats of our time.

Fortunately, Mr Dolan's company, Bristol-Myers Squibb, is among the leaders in this relatively new application of corporate talent to solve global problems. Through its Secure the Future programme, BMS is in partnership with a dozen non-governmental organisations and governments in Africa to fight HIV/ Aids and other diseases. And BMS is not alone. Collaborations between healthcare companies and health agencies - from Abbott to Wyeth and AmeriCares to Unicef - are making progress in the war against global disease. As examples:

* The Tanzania Care programme, a partnership between the Abbott Fund and the government of Tanzania, is addressing limited healthcare capacity and infrastructure with the goal of expanding access to HIV/Aids care and treatment. The approach includes building an outpatient treatment centre and renovating and equipping a laboratory at Muhimbili National Hospital; helping select regional hospitals become accredited so that they can dispense anti-retrovirals; introducing health management systems; training staff; and helping put systems and facilities into place that will result in increased access to voluntary counseling and testing.

* Eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus worldwide is the goal of an initiative launched by the US Fund for Unicef, Unicef, BD and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation among others in 1999. To date more than 45.9m women have been protected against tetanus in 33 countries, saving the lives of approximately 40,000 newborns.

* In 2000, Merck spearheaded an initiative with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the government of Botswana on Botswana's HIV/Aids epidemic. The partnership, the African Comprehensive HIV/Aids Partnerships (ACHAP), backs a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment and support. As a result, by December 2004 more than 32,000 people in Botswana had been enrolled in the country's national anti-retroviral treatment programme - of whom more than 28,000 are already under treatment, making it the largest national ARV treatment programme on the African continent. The Botswana/ Gates/Merck partnership has set an important benchmark for public-private partnership in addressing the HIV/Aids crisis.

These kinds of projects are key to ultimate victory against what once were seen as

intractable diseases. They also demonstrate, in human terms, corporate power's potential for accomplishing great good.

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