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Gates Donates \$104 Million To TB Charity

By Marilyn Chase

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation pumped \$104 million into the nonprofit Global Alliance for TB Drug Development to expand and speed the pipeline for new drugs to treat tuberculosis.

TB is a lethal lung infection that remains the world's second biggest infectious-disease killer after HIV/AIDS. The illness has been a target of the \$29.1 billion, Seattle-based foundation established by software mogul William H. Gates 3rd.

Standard treatments for TB are 40 years old and take six months to cure the disease. Incomplete therapy can spark multi-drug resistant TB, and the disease acts in synergy with HIV as the ultimate cause of death of many AIDS patients.

Maria Freire, president and chief executive officer of the New York-based TB Alliance, said the new money will enable it to put Bayer HealthCare's drug moxifloxacin into Phase III trials to determine effectiveness by 2010. Other new drugs include PA-824, a compound acquired by the alliance from Chiron Inc., and an array of compounds being developed with GlaxoSmithKline, an alliance spokeswoman said.

"Until the TB Alliance was formed in 2000, the pipeline of new TB drugs was essentially empty," said TB researcher Peter Small, a senior program officer in the TB program at the Gates Foundation.

"Now there are several promising compounds in development, and there's a real shot at a powerful new treatment regimen by the end of the decade." The new treatments, he added in an email, "could ultimately, save millions of lives."

The TB Alliance said it needs to raise another \$100 million from governments and foundations to advance the existing pipeline of 11 drugs.