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More Gates Foundation science support for global health, mobile technologies and robots in low resource settings? C'mon!

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Mobile phone

The Gates Foundation today announced it had awarded \$6.5 million in a new round of funding to 65 scientific teams in 16 countries to pursue innovative global health technologies, including an emphasis on mobile phone applications.

At the same time the announcement went out, Bill Gates was speaking in Washington, D.C., at the mHealth Summit, a meeting promoting the expansion of web-based mobile technologies into health care. The word "mHealth" represents a huge range of endeavors, many of them focused on developing country uses. Microsoft Research, which has a number of projects targeting mHealth, co-sponsored the conference with the NIH.

As it turned out, the live webcast of Gates' talk at mHealth didn't work ... which makes me hope that they work out the daily techno glitches we all experience with our phones and computers before they start depending too much on these gizmos to save our lives and improve the health of the poor.

I didn't see much coverage of Gates' talk but there were a few confused Tweets from participants regarding Gates' answer to the question of where he sees the most possibility for technological progress in the future.

"If you just want to pick one thing it's got to be robots," he was quoted as saying by Yahoo News. Gates went on to talk about how robots could be used to perform C-sections and reduce maternal mortality in low-resource settings.

"I'm not getting this," Tweeted Nandini Oomman with the Center for Global Development.

Among the 65 winners of the Gates Grand Challenges Explorations grants were some UW undergraduates working on an ultrasound device they hope can be used by midwives in poor countries and WSU nutrition scientist Shelley McGuire working on dietary means to improve infants' resistance to infectious diseases.

Gates blogged about the program's emphasis on cell phones, specifically noting a \$100,000 grant awarded to Terry Ferrari of World Vision who will study if specialized cell phones given to community health workers in remote areas of Mozambique can improve care for pregnant women and newborns.

<http://humanosphere.kplu.org/2010/11/more-gates-foundation-science-grants-for-global-health-mobile-technologies/>