

**Public release date: 15-Dec-2005**

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[BMJ-British Medical Journal](#)

**EU and G8 countries must help Russia tackle its health crisis**

***Editorial: The health crisis in Russia BMJ Volume 331, pp 1418-9***

Countries in the EU and G8 must help Russia tackle its health crisis, says an editorial in this week's BMJ.

Russia is one of the few developed countries where life expectancy has fallen in recent years, writes Rifat Atun of Imperial College London. Russia's total life expectancy of 66 years lags behind that of Japan by 16 years, the European Union by 14 years, and the United States by 12 years.

High levels of death and illness from non-communicable diseases, along with a low birth rate, mean that Russia's population is rapidly becoming smaller and sicker. This could lead to an economic burden that Russia may not be able to afford, given that its gross domestic product (GDP) is the lowest of all the G8 countries, he warns.

For EU and G8 leaders, a stable, healthy, and economically strong Russia is strategically important. In 2006 Russia will assume the rotating presidency of the G8. President Vladimir Putin has an opportunity to lead the global health debate and keep health high on the G8 agenda.

But first Russia must kick start the transformation of its own health system. And G8 and EU leaders must assist in driving through the health reforms it most desperately needs, he concludes.

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