

Three firms rank highest on access to poor

Donald G. Mcneil Jr

GlaxoSmithKline, Merck and Novartis have taken the top three spots again on the Access to Medicine Index, which ranks pharmaceutical companies on how readily they make their products available to the world's poor. It was the second time the rankings, which were created in 2008, have been issued. This time, 95 per cent of the brand-name companies approached by the Dutch foundation that started the index agreed to provide information; two years ago, only about half did.

European companies slightly edged U.S. companies in the rankings, while the four Japanese companies ranked were at or near the bottom.

The companies are graded on many factors, including whether they offer lower prices or donate drugs in poor countries, whether they license ge-

52-1) neric versions of their products or fight to prevent them, whether they donate expertise or money to struggling health systems and whether they do research on neglected diseases.

Gilead Sciences and Pfizer rose several ranks from 2008.

Those falling in rank were Novo Nordisk, Bayer, Bristol-Meyers Squibb and Merck KGaA (a German company no longer connected to the Merck based in New Jersey).

The index, which is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Dutch and British governments, Oxfam and other donors, also issued detailed "report cards" on 20 companies.

For the first time, generic drug-makers were ranked separately. Three Indian companies, Ranbaxy Laboratories, Cipla and Dr. Reddy's, took the top three spots. — **New York Times News Service**

Misc