

BOX 7.1 Numbers in the News

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation tries to channel funds toward solving problems that are not glamorous. One of the “down and dirty” problems facing the children of the world is moderate to severe diarrhea (MSD), a cause of 800,000 deaths per year. In 2006, the Gates Foundation funded the Global Enteric Multicenter Study (GEMS) to study MSD in children in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. During the study, which lasted for three years, one of the questions the researchers asked was about the long-term impact of MSD. Because malnutrition is also a problem among children in these regions, GEMS set up an experimental design that included over 9,000 test subjects suffering from MSD and over 13,000 control subjects who were not. The study found that the test subjects were eight times more likely to die in the next two months than the control subjects.² In addition to highlighting the problem as an important public policy issue, the study was also able to identify the most common causes in order to focus research attention on finding cures.