

## EDITORIAL

# The global emergence of IPE and collaborative care

The publication of the World Health Organization (WHO) Technical Report “Framework for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care” (World Health Organization, 2010) marks the emergence of interprofessional concepts on the global stage of the education of health and social care professionals. It also marks a developing understanding of collaborative decision making in the care of patients and clients. Both developments come at an opportune time for educators and practitioners who are looking to work across cultural and system boundaries. The need to reduce health inequalities and to improve the health of populations remains as imperative today as it was at the time of the signing of the WHO Declaration of Alma-Ata in 1978 (World Health Organization, 1978). The increasing focus of WHO Member States on primary health care (PHC) (World Health Organization, 2008a) is seen as a means to achieve equitable, fair, affordable and efficient care. From the many approaches taken to PHC around the world, it is clear that major policy commitments will be required and that these will need to be accompanied by the active and collective involvement of stakeholders, particularly the health and social care professions, through informed and manageable implementation processes (World Health Organization, 2008b).

Addressing health inequities as recently described by Dr Ramsammy in this Journal (Ramsammy, 2010), will require concerted interprofessional and multidisciplinary approaches in which each profession takes responsibility for identifying what they might bring to the table and how they might then work collaboratively to achieve common goals. Virtually all countries are faced with impending shortages in their health workforces, and the issue of the recruitment to, and retention in, remote and rural areas will remain of great concern.

Through the Framework document interprofessional collaboration in education and practice has come to be seen as an innovative strategy for alleviating the crises in the global health and social care workforce (World Health Organization, 2006), and as a means for addressing health goals in primary health care and chronic disease management. The Framework outlines action items that policy makers can apply within their local health systems.

Coincident with the development of the Framework, in June 2009 the WHO held a global consultation on the contribution of health professionals to the global health agenda. At this meeting representatives from more than 50 different health professional associations discussed global health challenges and synergies to foster collaborative work across professional boundaries to support primary health care; established the Health Professionals Global Network<sup>1</sup> as a forum to exchange experiences and perspectives on how health professionals can contribute to the global health agenda and the implementation of primary health care; and agreed that collective action is needed to intensify our efforts to reduce health inequities. The HPGN held a further very successful Global Consultation in

February 2010 on interprofessional education and collaboration using the Internet and other technologies at WHO in Geneva. More than 1,000 people from 97 countries participated, a major technical achievement and exposure for the Framework.

The global consultation concluded with a set of recommendations which participants were asked to prioritize as a follow-up to the meeting. The prioritization process pointed to a number of major recommendations. These recommendations included, for example, that: interprofessional collaboration should focus on global health priorities; a research agenda should be promoted in order to demonstrate the effective contribution of interprofessional collaboration to improving health outcomes; the development and implementation of policies and legislation to enhance interprofessional collaboration in education and practice should be supported; a health-needs-based and people-centred approach should be used to inform health system and workforce planning.

Work that has taken place over the past 10 years shows that interprofessional education and collaborative practice can play a significant role in mitigating many of the challenges faced by health systems around the world. Now is the time to act to implement strategies that have the potential to transform health care delivery, strengthen health systems and ultimately improve health outcomes and the quality of care. While every jurisdiction, region and country has unique challenges and needs, the goal of the Framework has been to provide suggestions and ideas that will build on the work currently underway and open dialogue and discussion around key interprofessional education and collaborative practice initiatives that could be implemented in the future. It is the hope of the WHO Study Group that the Framework will be the impetus for policymakers throughout the world to embrace interprofessional education and collaborative practice.

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## Note

1. The purpose of the Global Health Professionals Network is to maximize the potential of all health professionals through a virtual network, foster interprofessional collaboration, and contribute to the global health agenda. See: <http://hpgn.org/>

## References

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