World Health Organization Study Group on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice

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The urgency for action to enhance human resources for health internationally was recently highlighted by the World Health Report 2006: Working Together for Health which revealed an estimated worldwide shortage of almost 4.3 million doctors, midwives, nurses and support workers.¹ The 59th World Health Assembly recognized this crisis and adopted a resolution in 2006 calling for a rapid scaling-up of health workforce production through various strategies including the use of “innovative approaches to teaching in industrialized and developing countries”.²

As one innovative strategy to help tackle the global health workforce challenge, we are pleased to announce the launch of the World Health Organization (WHO) Study Group on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice. Working in collaboration with the International Association for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (InterEd), this initiative builds upon the considerable progress that has been achieved in this area since WHO first identified interprofessional education as an important component of primary health care in 1978³ and issued its technical report on this subject in 1988.⁴ Not only will the WHO Study Group conduct a much-needed international environment scan and an assessment of the current state of research in this area, but it will also identify, evaluate and synthesize the evidence on potential facilitators, incentives and levers for action that could be adopted as part of a global strategy for interprofessional education and collaborative practice (Exhibit 1). This work will form the basis for follow-up efforts and ensure that future activities are rooted in the best evidence possible.

The WHO Study Group consists of 25 top education, practice and policy experts from across every region of the world; members have formed three separate teams on

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interprofessional education, collaborative practice, and system-level supportive structures that are led by Prof Peter G. Baker (University of Queensland, Australia), Prof Yuichi Ishikawa (Kobe University, Japan) and Prof Dame Jill Macleod Clark (University of Southampton, UK) respectively. The WHO Study Group has also established partnerships with several existing communities of experts and enthusiasts (Exhibit 2) to further engage the wider community in this historic initiative while maximizing the specialized knowledge and local experiences of individuals worldwide.

It is clear that now is an exciting time of progress for interprofessional education and collaborative practice. Working together for better health is more important than ever, and we look forward to updating you as the WHO Study Group and its partners move towards a greater understanding of this important issue.

References