Opening the GATE for Assistive Health Technology: Shifting the paradigm

From:
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Distinguished guests, participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I very much regret that I cannot be with you today for the meeting on Global cooperation on Assistive Health Technology, but I wanted you to know that I am with you in spirit.

Global cooperation on Assistive Health Technology, or GATE, is being developed under my direct responsibility and supervision. And I feel honored to have this opportunity. Opening the GATE for Assistive Health Technology: Shifting the paradigm, will be a key initiative of the cluster for Health Systems and Innovation in the coming years.

In September 2013, during the side event on “Assistive Technology Opens Doors” at the United Nations, many of you requested WHO to develop and lead an international cooperation on assistive technology.

Since then, I have personally followed up on this request and took it as your mandate. WHO staff have been working hard towards this day. Thank you for investing your trust in us.
Access to assistive technology is an important issue for WHO, the organization mandated to improve the health of all people around the world. We cannot accept any more that only 1 in 10 persons who need assistive health products actually gets it. Without assistive technology, people remain confined to their huts, homes or institutions – excluded from the outside world, having poor health, locked into poverty and isolation. If we can truly unlock and open the GATE, it will create a new world for millions of people – people with disabilities, older adults and all those in need.

The need for assistive health technology is growing rapidly. The monitoring of trends in health and well-being of older adults and their determinants is one of the key activities of the cluster. We know that the rapid growth in this segment of the population, especially in low- and middle-income countries, will lead to large numbers of individuals whose lives can be dramatically improved with Assistive Health Technologies.

Looking ahead, beyond the Millennium Development Goals and 2015, WHO has identified Universal Health Coverage – the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer today – as the overarching goal to work towards for the global public health community.

One of the cornerstones of Universal Health Coverage is access to essential medicines and technologies – all health technologies, including assistive health technology.

Making assistive health technology accessible and affordable is a key WHO priority but at the same time, this is a big challenge, which we can’t meet alone. This challenge is not about responding to the needs of a small minority but to all people around the world. This initiative therefore comes at an opportune moment. Together, we can make the access to high-quality affordable health products a reality.

WHO has considerable experience in making health products affordable and accessible through innovation, partnership, transfer of technology, local
production, and bulk-purchase. We have a rich experience of many global programmes, initiatives and partnerships. In this day and age, we must acknowledge that every individual who needs or can benefit from assistive health technologies must have a right to access these.

WHO is ready to provide the leadership and impetus to improve access to assistive health technology through the GATE initiative. I am confident that this meeting is a very important first step in our journey together. I am pleased to learn that we have all the key stakeholders gathered today and I am sure that with your support, we can make a difference.

Opening the GATE for Assistive Health Technology is an innovative vision – a truly new paradigm that requires all of us to be prepared to think differently. With your support, GATE will become a WHO flagship programme. I cannot be with you today but I will follow your deliberations closely and look forward to having your guidance and support to make GATE a success.

Thank you.

S/D - MPK