Global Health Workforce Network

Education Hub

May 2017

Background

The manner in which health workers are formed is fundamental to their productivity, performance, distribution, and retention. The selection and education of health workers is also tied to broader social and economic development. The Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health (“GSHRH”); the report of the Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth (“the Commission”); and that of its Expert Group, all emphasize this point. Individually and collectively, they call for approaches and partnerships that bridge existing sectoral divisions and that scale up transformative, high quality education and life-long learning.

The GSHRH’s first strategic objective, complemented by the Commission and Expert Group reports, highlights the need to better match health worker competencies with population, health systems, and health labour market needs. Evidence is presented on a systemic mismatch across countries between competencies and needs; occupational stratification based on gender and socio-economic status; economic incentives prioritizing narrow specialisations and the development of professional occupations focused on curative services in tertiary care settings, as opposed to a PHC-oriented workforce best suited to equitably meet population needs; as well as curricula that is often fragmented, static, and outdated.

Together the normative documents call for a reorientation of the education agenda towards greater social accountability, and, within that, of educational curricula to meet local needs. Areas of priority identified include the promotion of team-oriented, inter-professional, and lifelong learning models, including through technical and vocational education and training (TVET); prioritization of rural pipelines to health education, including early exposure to learning and practice in the community; priority investments in education infrastructure, including institutional, educational, programmatic and accreditation capacity; regulation of public and private education and training institutions to ensure standards, quality and alignment with public policy goals; attention to and reshaping of economic incentives driving specialization; and the reorganization of scopes of practice to further optimize skills mix.

The Commission report, in particular, calls for the massive scale up of socially accountable, professional and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Key elements of a socially accountable approach include alignment of education curricula to community needs, targeted student selection with priority to underrepresented populations, inter-professional training in underserved locations and in areas of need, expansion of faculty in rural areas, and close partnership with and accountability to communities. TVET, similarly, has an untapped potential for
expanding participation and diversity in health employment, while at the same time producing a fit for purpose workforce that is able to meet population needs, particularly those of underserved communities. TVET is underutilised in the health sector, with an urgent need to establish global competencies and standards to support education programme development, evaluation, and improvement of quality in the area, as well as to enable alignment and regulation of TVET programmes alongside other health occupations.

**GHWN’s Education Hub**

Launched in 2016, the Global Health Workforce Network (GHWN) is a collaborative platform, facilitated by the health workforce department at WHO. GHWN serves as an important mechanism for inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagement, as is required to advance implementation of the GSHRH and the Commission recommendations.

**Vision**

GHWN’s Education Hub will bring together a core group of existing networks, agencies, academic institutions and individual experts to work collaboratively towards the development and dissemination of products that advance coordinated action across the health and education sectors, as called for by the GSHRH, the Commission Report and its five year action plan.

**Objective**

To develop a set of core global public goods that facilitate better alignment of student selection, education, and training with population, health systems, and health labour market needs; and that enable the scale up of socially accountable, professional and technical and vocational education in priority countries.

**Activities, May 2017 to May 2018**

(i) Develop, disseminate, and promote a global competency and educational standards framework for technical and vocational education and training (period ranging 12 to 48 months), aligned to meet primary health care needs and adopting the principles of socially accountable education, in order to support country policy, planning and scale up;

   a. The global competency and standards framework would build on a mapping of existing TVET models in secondary and tertiary health education; mapping of existing competency and standards frameworks; mapping of competency and standard’s needs; and stakeholder involvement in the planning, development and dissemination of the framework in order to ensure greatest value to WHO Member states, education institutions and professional associations.
(ii) Strengthen the evidence base linking student selection strategies with health workforce productivity, performance, distribution and retention, as well as broader socio-economic gains; including comparison to compulsory service programmes for recruitment; and

(iii) Map and strengthen the evidence base on best practices in health personnel regulation, as relevant to the global competency and standards framework, in order to ensure quality and alignment with public policy goals; and

(iv) Conduct a costing and value exercise aimed to support implementation of the global competency and standards framework at the national level.

The four activities are anticipated to jointly contribute to the scale up of transformative high quality education and life-long learning, as called for by the Commission (Recommendations 3), with emphasis on developing a rural pipeline of health workers, and to specific deliverables 3.1 to 3.3., as identified in the “Working for Health” Five Year Action Plan.

Governance

The Education Hub is established as a WHO Thematic Hub, with WHO staff maintaining a coordination, facilitation and oversight role. The Education Hub is established with an initial two-year time horizon, and a possibility to renew its mandate every two years on the basis of the development of an agreed plan of work aligned with the GS HRH and approved by WHO.

Members are invited by WHO on the basis of mutually agreed terms of reference. Members contribute to the network based on areas of individual interest and expertise.

To optimize available resources, the work of the Education Hub will largely be conducted virtually. In-person meetings, when necessary, will be organized around other existing events of mutual interest.

The products emerging from the collaboration enabled by the Education Hub will be copyright of WHO, with possibility of co-branding by collaborating institutions, unless agreed otherwise in writing by a WHO official of suitable authority.

Any network member may terminate engagement, by providing written notice. WHO, similarly, may terminate participation of a network member.

1 Five Year Action Plan “Working for Health”, Deliverable 3.1: Transform and expand education and life-long learning and intersectoral coordination integrated in the development and implementation of health workforce strategies, 3.2 Massive scale-up of socially accountable and transformative professional, technical and vocational education and training supported with technical cooperation, institutional capacity-building and financing, 3.3: Professional, technical and vocational education, training and life-long learning systems strengthened for health and social occupations (including community-based health workers) to achieve integrated people-centered care.

2 See GHWN Terms of Reference for detailed list of requirements.