

What is new in family medicine?

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Introducing a Guidebook on the Contribution of Family Medicine for Improving Health Systems

A seminal guidebook titled *Improving Health Systems: The Contribution of Family Medicine* has been released in April this year.¹

This guidebook is the outcome of the collaboration of the World Organization of Family Doctors (Wonca) and the World Health Organization and the result of the labors of a large number of leaders in family medicine and public health.

This guidebook should have a place with every family doctor and every stakeholder who is working towards improving health systems in their part of the world. These stakeholders include the policy makers, health managers, communities, academic institutions and health professionals of all levels. Together with the family doctors, they form the partnership pentagon.

It is increasingly clear that the reduction of disease burden in a locality, community, nation and region is contingent upon uniting the existing stakeholders through a strong partnership. Out of this partnership comes the synergy from a common alignment of vision, focus and resources to deal with what will make a difference in the health status of the people served.

The guidebook is about how to leverage the potential of family medicine to meet the most important health needs of individuals and populations. There are five elements in meeting people's health needs and reducing the nation's disease burden.

Focus

Family medicine helps the different partners to focus on meeting people's health needs

Divergent perspectives and conflicting priorities exist in all communities. Family medicine, because of its holistic outlook, can help to focus on basic unifying priorities such as the health status of each person within the community, the collective health of the people, and work towards more equitable distribution of health care resources. Shared solutions can emerge from this focus that maximizes the strengths and aptitudes of partners whose contributions can then be indispensable for a coherent approach to health service delivery. The exact health care delivery solutions must vary according to the socioeconomic and developmental circumstances of a society. Leaders of society need to make critical decisions in order to implement family medicine optimally within their specific countries in such a way that it could play the focusing role.

Unify

Family medicine helps to unify the resources needed to improve health care systems

Resources that are dispersed and divergent cannot improve the health status of the people. Health for all through primary health care is accepted as the basis of effective health care systems from developed countries to developing countries. The seamless integration of the three levels of health care – tertiary, secondary and primary – can only come about with the stakeholders working in unison. The resources that are concentrated together can be used to ensure that there is/are:

- Prioritization of essential services
- Adequate organization and financing
- Consistent service delivery
- Incentives that reinforce priorities
- Proper equipment and facilities and
- Appropriate training and support of health care providers at each level of healthcare provision.

Family medicine and public health elements working in unison can be the starting point if the unifica-

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tion of resources based on partnership and trust of the different stakeholders that provide health care directly or indirectly. These include the funding agencies and organizations.

Recognise

Family doctors can contribute much health care systems

Family doctors provide primary, personal, continuing and comprehensive care to individuals, families and the community. They can contribute as effective clinicians. They can also contribute as health care coordinators, as leaders, managers and supervisors. Make them the pivots of the health care system.

Empower

Family doctors can help only if they are empowered through training and development

Family doctors like their public health and hospital counterparts need empowerment through training and development. The family doctor needs to be holistic, patient-centred, and be trained to provide primary,

personal, continuing and comprehensive care for the individual, family and community. This requires policy decisions and allocation of adequate training and development resources for infrastructure, training process and continuing professional development. Details to achieve these are described in the guidebook.

Support

Family practice needs supportive environment for it to be optimally effective

A supportive environment is necessary for optimal practice of any healthcare discipline. This is true of family practice also. A supportive environment for practice, teaching, and research is needed for family practice to be optimally effective. Relationships, resources, and reforms are needed for a supportive environment to emerge. Family medicine leaders however, must make the first move. Armed with this guidebook and the vision of reducing disease burden, they can begin their work to convince the relevant stakeholders to form the partnership pentagon. The writers of this guidebook will not have labored in vain. *Carpe Diem*

Reference

- 1 Kohn C, Haq C, Rivo M, Shahady E., *Improving Health Systems: The Contribution of Family Medicine*. Singapore: Wonca, 2002.