

## Human resources for universal health coverage: a call for papers

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An adequate, performing health workforce is vital for improving health service coverage and health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Yet the availability, distribution, capacity and performance of human resources for health (HRH) varies widely and many countries have fewer health workers than needed for high coverage of essential health services, according to the *World health report 2006*.<sup>2</sup> Signs of progress are emerging, though; several countries are successfully addressing their problems in the area of HRH, resulting in improvements in health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> These gains are, however, vulnerable: shortages of and inequitable access to health workers still thwart many countries' attempts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their efforts to scale up their response against noncommunicable diseases and attain universal health coverage.

Universal Health Care (UHC) was defined by the World Health Organization in 2005.<sup>4</sup> Since then it has gained increased recognition as a framework for embracing various global health priorities. New evidence, policy options and advocacy<sup>5</sup> in support of the progressive achievement of UHC have been the focus of the *World health report: health systems financing*<sup>6</sup> and of numerous global health events.<sup>7,8</sup> In 2011 the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on UHC,<sup>9</sup> and in 2012 a United Nations General Assembly resolution bolstered political momentum in support of UHC and underscored the need for an "adequate, skilled, well-trained and motivated workforce".<sup>10</sup> In this context ensuring that appropriate HRH strategies and priorities are embedded in the UHC and post-MDG agenda becomes crucial.

As health systems progressively broaden their scope to cover noncommunicable diseases and other priorities, health workers will face new demands for more comprehensive and equitable service delivery. The challenge lies in addressing past and present gaps while simultaneously anticipating future ac-

tions to strengthen the health workforce as an integral part of health systems.

The HRH needs demand renewed attention, strategic intelligence and action. Gaps in health worker distribution, competency, quality, motivation and performance need to be addressed in addition to sheer numbers. Fundamental changes in the way in which health workers are trained, managed, regulated and supported and in the role of the public sector in shaping labour market forces will be necessary.

Against this background, the *Bulletin* will publish a theme issue on HRH and universal health coverage to provide an opportunity to identify the changes in HRH investment, production, deployment and retention required to achieve UHC. Its publication will coincide with the Third Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, to be held in Recife, Brazil, on 10–13 November 2013.

The Third Global Forum is convened by the Global Health Workforce Alliance (GHWA) – a multisectoral partnership established in 2006 to spearhead the response to HRH challenges – in conjunction with WHO, the Pan American Health Organization and the Government of Brazil. The First Global Forum (Uganda, 2008) resulted in the development of a global HRH roadmap,<sup>11</sup> at the Second Global Forum (Thailand, 2011), countries and stakeholders reconvened to review progress and renew their commitments towards increased investment, sustained leadership and the adoption of effective HRH policies.

The Third Global Forum will provide an opportunity to update the HRH agenda, to make it more relevant to the current global health policy discourse, including the focus on achieving the health MDGs, the objective of UHC and the emerging debate on the post-2015 agenda. Additionally, countries and HRH stakeholders will be invited to explicitly commit to HRH actions as the basis for an inclusive accountability framework.

The Third Global Forum's programme will position health workforce development as a critical requirement for effective UHC and will be designed around one overarching theme – "human resources for health: foundation for universal health coverage and the post-2015 development agenda" – as well as five sub-themes and their corresponding tracks: (i) leadership, partnerships and accountability for HRH development; (ii) impact-driven HRH investments towards UHC; (iii) a supportive HRH legal and regulatory landscape for UHC; (iv) empowerment of health workers by overcoming policy, social and cultural barriers; (v) the harnessing of HRH innovation and research through new management models and technologies.<sup>12</sup>

To provide a solid evidence base and background to the Third Global Forum's proceedings, the theme issue will feature commissioned as well as independently submitted articles that will set the scene for and generate innovative thinking on HRH for UHC. GHWA and WHO welcome contributions on the Forum's general theme, five sub-themes and tracks, especially those emphasizing aspects of HRH directly related to achieving UHC. Submission of relevant country experiences is particularly encouraged. The deadline for submissions is 10 March 2013. Manuscripts should respect the *Bulletin's* Guidelines for contributors (available at: <http://submit.bwho.org>) and mention this call for papers in the cover letter. All submissions will be reviewed by peers. ■

### References

Available at: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/91/2/13-117200>

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