Healthcare Information for All

Improving the availability of health information worldwide

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People are dying for lack of knowledge
Tens of thousands of children and adults die needlessly every day because they do not receive basic life-saving interventions that are often locally available but simply not provided due to indecision, delays, misdiagnosis, and incorrect treatment.

Towards Universal Health Coverage and realising the right to health
A key determinant to reach Sustainable Development Goal 3 is a resilient, well-functioning, and responsive health system that meets the basic needs of health workers and thereby empowers them to provide safe and effective care for all. Of all the basic needs of health workers, the need for reliable, appropriate healthcare information is fundamental to make informed decisions.

The global healthcare information system represents the totality of processes and structures that underlie the production, exchange, availability and use of relevant, reliable health care information. This system requires cooperation among a wider range of professionals including – health care providers, policy makers, researchers, publishers, information professionals, indexers, systematic reviewers.

What we find is that this system is not working because of lack of communication and cooperation, lack of understanding of information needs and how to meet them, and lack of political and financial investment.

Figure 1: WHO systems framework

- In 810 caregivers in developing countries do not know the two key symptoms of childhood pneumonia – fast and difficult breathing – which indicates the need for urgent treatment.
- Only 1 in 10 children with diarrhea in India receive increased fluids to prevent death from dehydration.
- 7 in 10 doctors caring for sick children in district hospitals in Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Philippines, Tanzania, and Uganda had poor basic knowledge of leading causes of child death such as childhood pneumonia severe malnutrition, and sepsis.
- 4 in 10 family doctors in Pakistan prescribed tranquillizers as first-line treatment for hypertension.
- 7 in 10 children with malaria treated at home are misdiagnosed, contributing to 2000 deaths every day in Africa alone.
- More than 9 in 10 prescriptions for tuberculosis in India are incorrect, predisposing those patients and the general population to multi-drug resistant tuberculosis in the future.

Example of HIFA project: First HIFA Smart Goal – towards Mobile Healthcare Information for All

‘Thousands of lives could be saved every day is all mobile phones had basic healthcare knowledge, including and especially first aid, maternal and child health information for citizens.’

mHIFA Goal: By 2017, at least one mobile network operator or mobile handset manufacturer, in at least one low- or middle-income country, will provide access to essential health information for direct use by citizens and free of any charges.

Example from HIFA-French

HIFA-FR as a catalyst to interconnect the different public health issues and bring together global stakeholders to create a coherent public health policy through push and pull mechanisms.

Push model – where evidence is pushed to decision makers with the hope of achieving uptake.

Pull model – encourages policymakers and other stakeholders to reach for applicable knowledge to design feasible and viable policies.

At the heart of HIFA lies communication, understanding, and advocacy. It aims:

1. To provide a platform to connect healthcare information systems stakeholders
2. To better understand the health information needs of healthcare providers and how best to meet them
3. To ensure that healthcare information system is a top priority for improving global health
4. Across a network of global forums, HIFA brings together on one virtual platform the experiential knowledge of health professionals, researchers, and information specialists.

With five global discussion forums in three different languages

Figure 3: HIFA forums and membership

Call to action
All stakeholders need to work together to develop a better understanding of information needs and to support one another. This is achieved through sharing of expertise and experience to improve our individual and collective effectiveness in meeting the information needs to healthcare providers in low, middle income countries. The information needs of healthcare providers are central to the realisation of universal access to evidence informed healthcare and universal health coverage.

‘Not utopian – it is achievable, given the will. Achievement could help save thousands of lives every day’

References

Further reading

Join HIFA for free www.hifa.org

British Medical Association bma.org.uk