



e LEARNING for undergraduate health professional education

A systematic review informing a radical
transformation of health workforce
development

Edited by: Najeeb Al-Shorbaji, Rifat Atun,
Josip Car, Azeem Majeed, Erica Wheeler

Imperial College
London

 World Health
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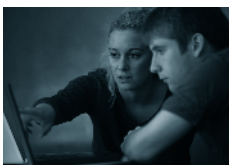
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Foreword

A defining feature of health systems in the 21st century will be the capacity to respond to populations' needs, while at the same time anticipating future scenarios and effectively planning for evolving requirements. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the health workforce domain: a fundamental mismatch exists between supply and demand in both the global and national health labour markets, and this is likely to increase due to prevalent demographic, epidemiologic and macroeconomic trends.

Unchecked loss of health workers due to attrition and migration, maldistribution within countries, absolute deficits in some low- and middle-income countries, uneven quality and performance of the health workforce, outdated training models and an over-reliance on cadres focusing on curative services in secondary and tertiary care settings are some of the most common health workforce challenges hindering efforts to attain global and national health objectives. At the same time, we have better evidence than ever before on effective solutions. For instance, it is widely recognized that what, how and where students are taught and who educates and trains the health workforce are major factors in determining the readiness and resilience of a health system, including the capacity to produce the adequate types and number of health workers, to equip them with the required competencies, and to deploy and retain them where they are most needed.

The scope and magnitude of the health workforce challenges we face require both greater investment and more effective and strategic use of available resources: in this context, it becomes necessary to fully exploit the potential of innovative approaches and new technologies to health workforce education, deployment and management.

We live in an era where technology is enabling us to gain knowledge at a speed formerly inaccessible. Information

and communication technology (ICT) in particular, is an effective enabler to improve the health of populations, both directly and through improved health workforce capacity and accessibility.

The Department of Health Workforce in collaboration with the Department of Knowledge, Ethics and Research commissioned this report to provide countries with evidence to inform and guide the adoption of innovative, technology-enabled models into health professional education, so as to augment capacities to scale up production, enhance quality and relevance of training, and adopt equity-focused policies.

The analysis identifies the different forms of ICT that are used to deliver undergraduate health professional education and evaluates the effects of both networked and non-networked computer-based eLearning on students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and satisfaction. It provides insight into advantages and disadvantages of eLearning and an overview of how the quality of eLearning can be measured. Importantly, it identifies and discusses the critical success factors for the implementation and adaptation of eLearning interventions, as well as strategies to equitably and effectively introduce, institutionalize and sustain eLearning.

Furthermore, the report demonstrates the need to strengthen mechanisms at the country level between health workforce institutions of higher learning and ministries of health and education, in order to support quality education across an increasing number of health professionals.

eLearning has an under-exploited potential to support health workforce capacity building in different contexts, and can empower health workers to take charge directly of their own competency development, to enable them to play a full role as change agents in addressing the challenges we will face in the 21st century.

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