

Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world

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“.....A Lancet Commission highlights a call from 20 professional and academic leaders for major reform in the training of doctors and other healthcare professionals for the 21st century. Changes are needed because of fragmented, outdated, and static curricula that produce ill-equipped graduates. The Commission argues for major reform across the entire medical education system, in order to produce competency-led curricula for the future...”

“.....100 years ago, a series of studies about the education of health professionals, led by the 1910 Flexner report, sparked groundbreaking reforms. Through integration of modern science into the curricula at university-based schools, the reforms equipped health professionals with the knowledge that contributed to the doubling of life span during the 20th century.

By the beginning of the 21st century, however, all is not well. Glaring gaps and inequities in health persist both within and between countries, underscoring our collective failure to share the dramatic health advances equitably. At the same time, fresh health challenges loom. New infectious, environmental, and behavioural risks, at a time of rapid demographic and epidemiological transitions, threaten health security of all. Health systems worldwide are struggling to keep up, as they become more complex and costly, placing additional demands on health workers.

Professional education has not kept pace with these challenges, largely because of fragmented, outdated, and static curricula that produce ill-equipped graduates. The problems are systemic: mismatch of competencies to patient and population needs; poor teamwork; persistent gender stratification of professional status; narrow technical focus without broader contextual understanding; episodic encounters rather than continuous care; predominant hospital orientation at the expense of primary care; quantitative and qualitative imbalances in the professional labour market; and weak leadership to improve health-system performance. Laudable efforts to address these deficiencies have mostly floundered, partly because of the so-called tribalism of the professions—ie, the tendency of the various professions to act in isolation from or even in competition with each other.

Redesign of professional health education is necessary and timely, in view of the opportunities for mutual learning and joint solutions offered by global interdependence due to acceleration of flows of knowledge, technologies, and financing across borders, and the migration of both professionals and patients. What is clearly needed is a thorough and authoritative re-examination of health professional education, matching the ambitious work of a century ago.

That is why this Commission, consisting of 20 professional and academic leaders from diverse countries, came together to develop a shared vision and a common strategy for postsecondary education in medicine, nursing, and public health that reaches beyond the confines of national borders and the silos of individual professions.

The Commission adopted a global outlook, a multiprofessional perspective, and a systems approach. This comprehensive framework considers the connections between education and health systems. It is centred on people as co-producers and as drivers of needs and demands in both systems. By interaction through the labour market, the provision of educational services generates the supply of an educated workforce to meet the demand for professionals to work in the health system. To have a positive effect on health outcomes, the professional education subsystem must design new instructional and institutional strategies.....”

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