

# UHC: Leave no health worker behind

Faith Nawagi looks at Universal Health Coverage from the perspective of the health worker

If achieved, the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) agenda be a game-changer for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the health sector globally.<sup>1</sup> Prominent in this agenda are the populations served by health workers but little emphasis is placed on the health and the wellbeing of the health workers themselves.

Many health workers, of which nurses and midwives make up the largest slice, face hardships prioritising their own health.<sup>2</sup> From my perspective in Uganda, as in many low-income countries, health workers have no health insurance, face professional hazards, experience job burn out, depression, and stress among others mainly due to the high burden of the patient-to-health-worker ratio.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there are few counselling and rehabilitation centres to help health workers cope and receive psychological support in the workplace. Where available, it is not used effectively by health workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a few health workers lose their lives and catch the disease due to inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as they handled infected patients.<sup>4</sup> Another sad event of recent times was the suicide in 2018 of Professor Bongani Mawethu Mayosi, an eminent South African cardiologist whose work was key in changing the face of cardiology in Africa.<sup>5,6</sup> Furthermore, the various codes of conduct and Hippocratic Oaths taken by each health professional rarely emphasise health workers paying attention to their own individual wellbeing during their professional career.<sup>7,8</sup> As we strive to achieve UHC, prioritising the wellbeing of the health workforce is key to ensuring that we do not lose the people critical to driving this agenda forward.

Therefore, this is a call to various global bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO), World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), World Medical Association (WMA), International Council of Nurses (ICN), International Confederation of Midwives, International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA), governments and professional and regulatory bodies to review and update the various codes of conduct and Oaths of health professionals globally, to ensure that health professionals make it a promise to maintain their own wellbeing as they serve the needs of the populations. Furthermore, governments should strive to create health insurance or similar financial plans for the health workforce aimed at seeing that a health worker doesn't

Faith Nawagi is the, GEMx, Global Partnership Development Rep Africa, ECFMG FAIMER

The goal is to ensure that the health and wellbeing of the health worker are prioritised globally as we pursue UHC, especially regarding mental health, professional hazards, and access to health care.

We are losing many health workers needed to drive the UHC initiatives due to their own mental ill health, professional hazards and inappropriate or lack of health-care financing approaches prioritised for them. Furthermore, the existing code of conduct and oath that govern the professions have no requirement for the health professionals to prioritise their own wellbeing as they perform their roles.

have to suffer huge financial burden to access health care in the same setting they serve. This will then create a future global health workforce that ensures that the health workers' rights to health care and their health as a priority are well addressed without leaving anyone behind as we aim to attain UHC.

## References

1. WHO, "Universal Health Coverage (UHC)," last modified 2019, accessed February 17, 2020, [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)).
2. Nigel Crisp, Sharon Brownie, and Charlotte Refsum, Nursing and Midwifery: The Key to the Rapid and Cost-Effective Expansion of High-Quality Universal Health Coverage. (Doha, Qatar: World Innovation Summit for Health, 2018, 2018), <https://www.wish.org.qa/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IMPJ6078-WISH-2018-Nursing-181026.pdf>.
3. Fred Ssengooba and Suzan Kiwanuka, Universal Health Coverage in Uganda: Looking Back and Forward to Speed up the Progress (Makerere University Kampala Uganda, 2017), <http://speed.musph.ac.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chapter-12.pdf>.
4. Zahara Hirji, "Nurses And Doctors Responding To The US Coronavirus Outbreak Are Getting Sick And Dying," Buzz Feed News, last modified March 26, 2020, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/zaharahirji/us-health-care-workers-sick-coronavirus>
5. N. Ntusi, "Professor Bongani Mayosi: A Legend in Our Time," South African Medical Journal 108, no. 9 (August 28, 2018): 695-696-696, accessed February 17, 2020, <http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/12408>.
6. SABC News, "Prof Mayosi's Death Puts Spotlight on Depression - SABC News - Breaking News, Special Reports, World, Business, Sport Coverage of All South African Current Events. Africa's News SABC News, "Prof Mayosi's Death Puts Spotlight on Depression - SABC News - Breaking News, Special Reports, World, Business, Sport Coverage of All South African Current Events. Africa's News Leader.," last modified 2018, accessed February 17, 2020, <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/prof-mayosis-death-puts-spotlight-on-depression/>.
7. Ministry of Health (MOH) Uganda, The Quality Improvement Methods. A Manual for Health Workers in Uganda, 2015, <http://health.go.ug/download/file/1054>.
8. Association of Physicians of Uganda (ASU), "Hippocratic Oath I Association of Physicians of Uganda (APU)," last modified 2019, accessed February 17, 2020, <http://ugphysicians.org/content/hippocratic-oath>.