

Primary Health Care: A path towards social justice

Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde reports on The Network: Towards Unity For Health's 2020 Conference

The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) is an international organisation that fosters equitable community-oriented health services, education and research with the goal of improving health locally and globally. It convenes innovative healthcare organisations, universities, community institutions, and thought leaders from all over the world. It hosts weekly expert virtual symposiums and a MEDLINE indexed journal, *Education for Health*. This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, TUFH held its first-ever virtual annual conference, 23–25 September 2020. It was hosted by the University of Mexico through Zoom.

The main theme was 'Primary Health Care: A Path towards Social Justice. Systems and Community Based Responses for Covid 19'. The discussion focused on:

1. Inter-sectoral collaboration and the social determinants of health
2. Measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
3. Working with underserved populations towards community empowerment

The meeting was attended by 608 participants from all over the world, of whom 238 were TUFH Members, 249 were TUFH non-members, 125 were from the University of Mexico and 270 were students. The participants were from 47 countries and represented all seven WHO regions.

Over three days, there were 50 sessions, 12 workshops, 26 oral presentations with 319 posters, TUFH talks with 16 presentations and TUFH documentaries with 7 documentaries. The TUFH documentaries were introduced for the first time at this conference.

There were four very provocative keynote speeches addressing the subthemes. The Office of the Secretariat hosted seven Zoom accounts during the conference. All sessions were available to registered participants through hyperlinked daily agendas sent by mail and through information in the TUFH 2020 group created at tufh.org. All sessions were recorded and the sessions were edited and published in the tufh.org TUFH 2020 group which was created for the conference. The TUFH Conference and Membership Coordinator was available through WhatsApp, email, the secretariat email and through tufh.org for any issues at any time, both for moderators and participants. All messages were answered in a matter of minutes and all issues that arose

Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde is the Director Health Workforce Education and Development at the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) and the Secretary General of the Network TUFH.

were resolved immediately. This ensured that the virtual conference ran smoothly.

At the end of the meeting, the Network TUFH came out with a declaration indicating TUFH's commitment to being a vibrant and effective network of networks that realises, implements and assesses the effectiveness of global actions. It noted that the world desires and the future deserves Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Equitable Health Care for all, including the disadvantaged and neglected minorities. It also noted that climate change is increasingly affecting the environment, health and healthcare and that COVID-19 has shown gaps in social justice factors of equity, diversity, and inclusion across all health systems and populations. There was agreement that global policy recommendations are majorly ineffective as they are not developed with and by the communities addressing complex local realities.

The declaration committed to work toward inclusiveness defined by a global effort of caring for each other, returning the human spirit to healthcare, including community voices, culture, lived experiences, empathy and compassion. TUFH will work towards improving partnerships and collaborations with global and regional associations and institutions by aligning strategies, efforts, and initiatives using frequent and consistent communication in the creation of joint priorities of action beyond the health sector with non-health sectors.

It also committed to interprofessional education defined by: collectively developing practical solutions to underlying health issues by using TUFH's Partnership Pentagram, which is framed within the SDGs and Social Determinants of Health, emphasising that creating a health system based upon people's needs must not only involve policymakers, academic institutions, health professionals, communities, social and professional networks in the change process, but must do so within the context of where people live and work.

A further commitment was to policy change defined by: advocacy to ensure the voice of marginalised populations including but not limited to first nations, indigenous peoples, the elderly, women, migrants and refugees, and people living in remote and rural areas are adequately represented at the table where health, system and funding decisions are made. It highlighted the need to drive communal interests by supporting local change agents toward the adoption and implementation of global policy recommendations and provide international structures and systems for the structural implementation of social accountability (e.g. curriculum accreditation that responds to and does not increase disadvantages).