

THE 5th ANNUAL AFREhealth SYMPOSIUM, 2022

Dr. Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde reports on the highlights of the 2022 AFREhealth symposium.

This year the African Forum for Research and Global Health (AFREhealth) held its 5th annual symposium in Harare, Zimbabwe at the Harare International Conference Centre, from 2nd to 4th August, 2022. This was a face-to-face event. It was an exciting affair considering that the 2021 symposium was held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

AFREhealth is an interdisciplinary health professional grouping that seeks to work with Ministries of Health, training institutions and other stakeholders to improve the quality of health care in Africa, through research, education and capacity building. It is a conglomerate of individuals, institutions, associations and networks from all the geographic and linguistic regions of Africa; namely Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Arabophone countries. Membership is open to African and external stakeholders committed to an Africa with strong, self-sustaining and robust health systems. It was launched by the joint leadership of MEPI (Medical Education Partnership Initiative) and NEPI (Nursing Education Partnership Initiative) during the MEPI/NEPI Symposium in Nairobi on 2nd August 2016; through adoption of the Nairobi Resolution on AFREhealth. The Vision of AFREhealth is to 'be a responsive and leading African forum in the pursuit of excellence in health research, education and service provision'. Its mission is to 'provide African leadership for responsive health professions education, training, research and service delivery' through: (a) Partnership/Collaboration, (b) Networking, (c) Advocacy, (d) Resource mobilization, (e) Strategic communication, (f) Sharing best practices, (g) capacity building, and (h) Transformation of responsive health professions education.

The symposium attracted 200 participants from 19 countries; bringing together many health professionals from all over Africa and the rest of the world. It deliberated on important topics aimed at finding solutions to the health challenges faced in Africa; and to chart a future for AFREhealth.

The theme of the conference was "Covid-19 Pandemic and Post Pandemic Issues for Health Professions Education, Research and Service Delivery". The President of AFREhealth from Malawi, Prof Abigail Kazembe observed that the theme was timely because there is need to respond to post COVID-19 pandemic challenges; and to also be prepared for the next pandemic. The subthemes of the symposium were carefully chosen to start to address the emerging issues, including:

- Innovations in health professions education – lessons from Covid-19 pandemic state for post pandemic period;
- Collaboration in research – African initiatives for strengthening research and collaboration across the continent and beyond;
- Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on service delivery and the requirements for quality-of-care post pandemic;
- Leadership in Africa on decolonization, climate change, research and development.

Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde is the President of AFREhealth

The conference was preceded by pre-conference meetings convened by the University of California San Francisco. The pre-conference meetings addressed the basics of project and change management for busy clinicians, and mentoring the mentors. Both of these discussions were well attended and generated a lot of interest.

A Governing Council meeting and an Annual General Meeting were held during the Conference. There was a change of leadership of the organization during the conference. A new President, Executive Council and Governing Council were installed. Appreciation awards were given to the outgoing Governing Council.

The main Symposium itself had 5 plenary sessions with 20 plenary speakers, 15 from Africa and 5 from outside Africa. There were 95 abstract presenters, 65 presenters gave oral presentations while 30 presented posters. There were 6 satellite sessions on various topics like Grant Writing for Success, Enabling Medical Education Capacity-Building in Africa and Experience with Interprofessional Education (IPE). All the presentations were very engaging and all sessions were well attended throughout the conference. All this information can be accessed at the AFREhealth website: <https://afrehealth.org/2022symposium/>.

One of the topics that kept cropping up during the conference was decolonization of Global Health. Three plenary speakers addressed the topic; with Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi, the Executive Director of the African Population and Health Research Center based in Nairobi, Kenya talking about "Actions for Decolonizing Global Health". Dr. Ndola Prata, from the University of California, Global Health Institute (UCGHI) talked about "Decolonising Global Health: Challenges and Opportunities for Research and Training in Sexual and Reproductive Health". Dr. Thirusha Naidu from the University of KwaZulu-Natal talked about "Decolonizing global health: A case of Low-income countries". All these topics generated a lot of interest and discussions. At the end of it all, Prof Francis Omaswa, the Executive Director of the African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation called on Africans to change their mindset and narrative from blaming colonization to providing ideas on how to change Africa into a dynamic and vibrant continent. He noted that Africa was rich in resources, be it physical or the necessary human capital. It is up to the Africans to take advantage of these and move forward.

Congratulations AFREhealth