

The Global TUFH Conference: Beyond Boundaries: Health Equity through a Culture of Learning



Reported by Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde

The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) held its annual symposium from October 23rd to 26th of 2023. This also marked the 44th anniversary of the organization. The Conference was co-hosted by The Network: TUFH and the University of Sharjah, a university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It was held at the beautiful compass of the University of Sharjah.

TUFH is an international, inter-sectoral and intergenerational organization that fosters equitable community-oriented health services, education and research, with the goal of improving health locally and globally. We convene innovative health care organizations, universities, community institutions, and thought leaders from all over the world. It holds an annual conference in different parts of the world as part of its activities.

The theme of the Sharjah conference was “Beyond Boundaries: Health Equity through a Culture of Learning”. The subthemes were:

- How the Community learns
- How Healthcare Practitioners learn
- How Students learn
- How Policymakers learn

Health equity is defined as the absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically” , According to WHO, Culture of Learning involves learning new behaviors, habits, skills, as well as the requisite knowledge foundation.

Diverse presentation formats enriched the program, encompassing 5 workshops, 6 TUFH Talks, 159 Oral Presentations, 4 Keynote Addresses, and 6 TUFH Documentaries. TUFH Talks is a format, akin to a Ted Talk, where participants give short, powerful talks (3 minutes) that share projects, policies, collaborations, or initiatives in which health, education, or other sectors contribute to a healthier society. They are followed by a facilitated discussion among presenters and participants. Documentaries are short videos 5-10 minutes that focus on the local communities and showcase local action and are related to the theme. Having different formats makes the conference versatile and interesting. Everyone finds something to catch their attention. Another interesting part of the conference is what is known as “Conference

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on the Move”, this happens at every conference. The organizers take the attendees out to the community to visit an educational and a cultural activity. Sharjah offered an thrilling array of visits that included a mobile medical clinic, which is a field clinic, furnished and equipped with large medical devices. It offers services to elderly people and disabled people, and those who face difficulty in moving. Others visited the Sharjah Academy for Astronomy, Space Sciences & Technology, Sharjah University hospital, The University skills training centers to mention but a few.

The conference was hybrid with 183 participants, 33 of them attended virtually while 150 were there in person, 42% were students. The participants included people from all over the world.

At the opening ceremony that was attended by His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Ahmed Al Qasimi, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah and President of the University of Sharjah, as the secretary general, I reminded members that we had a great opportunity to learn from some of the brightest minds in health and other fields, share our own experiences and insights, and engage in meaningful discussions and debates on some of the most pressing issues facing our communities and our world today. At the end of the conference I was confident that this was a valuable and inspiring experience for all of us and we were able to explore new ideas, collaborate with one another, and chart a course towards a healthier and more equitable future for all. I was delighted to hand over the post of secretary General to my Colleague Dr. William Burdick from the USA, who had been my vice for the past 2 years.

At the end of the conference the meeting came up with a declaration, as it does every year entitled “ The Sharjah Consensus: Advancing TUFH strategies 2024-2027.” This Sharjah consensus is not just about local impact; it aspires to bring transformative change on a regional and global scale. By building community trust, fostering inclusive governance, and cultivating partnerships, it seeks to fortify health systems worldwide. The emphasis on co-producing community-centric healthcare education and a socially accountable health workforce reflects a commitment to a holistic approach that resonates universally. Through systems thinking, guided by human values and social accountability, the Sharjah Consensus 2023 sets the stage for meaningful, scalable impact. It can be accessed at tufh.org