The 7th African Forum for Research and Education in Health.

The 7th African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) Symposium was held from August 6th to 8th, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing together 225 professionals from around the world. The event focused on the theme: "Progress towards SDGs in Africa: Celebrating Milestones and Overcoming Challenges." The symposium's subthemes were:

1. Harnessing Digital Technology and Innovation for Health Professions Education towards attainment of SDGs.
2. Research towards attainment of SDGs.
3. Efforts to bridge gaps: Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
4. Leadership and Advocacy towards sustaining the momentum of SDGs.

AFREhealth is an interdisciplinary network that collaborates with ministries of health, training institutions, and stakeholders to improve healthcare quality in Africa through research, education, and capacity building. Its membership spans individuals, institutions, associations, and networks across Africa's diverse linguistic and geographic regions: Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone. The organization welcomes both African and global stakeholders committed to strengthening Africa's health systems.

A Platform for Reflection and Progress

The annual symposium provides a vital platform for AFREhealth members and partners to reflect on health challenges and progress in Africa and globally. This year's theme emphasized Africa's journey toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), celebrating successes while addressing persistent challenges with renewed determination.

The program was thoughtfully structured, featuring nine plenary sessions, including opening and closing ceremonies, six interactive workshops, and 30 breakaway sessions. These formats facilitated deep engagement, with plenary sessions focusing on key subthemes and breakaway sessions allowing for more detailed exploration and discussions.

Subtheme 1: Harnessing Digital Technology and Innovation

This subtheme highlighted the transformative potential of digital technology in health professions education, critical for achieving SDG 3 (*Good Health and Well-being*). Africa has made significant progress in leveraging virtual communities of practice, applying artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching, and adopting eLearning strategies. These innovations are driving accessibility, collaboration, and resource-sharing, equipping health professionals with tools to address regional health challenges.

Subtheme 2: Research Driving Sustainable Development

Research is foundational to sustainable development, driving innovation, shaping policies, and addressing unique challenges. Africa's growing commitment to locally relevant and globally impactful research has yielded advancements in combating infectious diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS and tackling non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. Presentations explored mental health, patient-centered care, aging, vaccines, and innovations in health professions education, showcasing the region's research contributions to global health.

Subtheme 3: Bridging Gaps for Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Achieving UHC is central to the SDGs, ensuring equitable access to health services without financial hardship. Despite progress, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Discussions centered on strengthening health systems, improving quality of care, training health workers, and addressing non-communicable diseases. The urgency of equitable resource allocation and innovative solutions to healthcare gaps was emphasized.

Subtheme 4: Leadership and Advocacy for Sustaining Momentum

Leadership and advocacy are critical in advancing the SDGs. Effective leadership entails setting a vision, mobilizing resources, building partnerships, and ensuring accountability, while advocacy raises awareness, influences policy, and engages stakeholders. Civil society, the private sector, and the media play pivotal roles in amplifying the urgency of the SDGs, fostering collective action, and driving sustainable change.

Unique Plenary: Global Workforce Dynamics

A notable plenary session addressed *"The New US Alternative Models for Licensure of International Medical Graduates and Their Potential Impact on People's Health and Wellness in Low-Resource Settings."* This sparked vibrant discussions on health worker migration and the global human resource crisis, emphasizing ethical recruitment and retention strategies to strengthen local health systems.

Celebrating Milestones and Addressing Challenges

The symposium celebrated AFREhealth's milestones, including advancements in health professions training, regionally relevant research, and enhanced South-South collaboration. These achievements highlight the resilience, innovation, and partnerships driving progress in African healthcare.

However, significant challenges remain. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of health systems, underscoring the need for investment and reform. Climate change, economic inequality, and political instability pose additional threats to sustainable development. Yet, these challenges call for innovation, collective action, and unwavering commitment.

Moving Forward: A Call to Action

The symposium concluded with a call to action, urging participants to draw inspiration from past successes while addressing persistent gaps. Harnessing the power of technology, championing research, bridging healthcare disparities, and fostering leadership are essential strategies for advancing the SDGs.

The journey toward achieving the SDGs is a shared responsibility. By working collaboratively, the AFREhealth community and its partners can overcome challenges and build a prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future for Africa and the world.

Elsi Kigul-Malwadde, past President AFREHealth

The Network TUFH Conference



The Network Towards Unity for Health (TUFH)

The Network Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) held its yearly symposium on 10-13 September 2024 jointly with Rural WONCA (The Working Party on Rural Practice). This joint conference was named Ubuntu 2024 meaning "I am, because you are". It brought together the TUFH 2024 Annual Conference for TUFH, which celebrated its 45th anniversary in 2024, and the 20th WONCA World Rural Health Conference!

This conference was uniquely co-hosted by 5 partners in Cape Town, South Africa: University of the Western Cape; University of Cape Town; Stellenbosch University; Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and the Department of Health and Wellness – Western Cape Government. The conference was held at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) , an esteemed public research institution located in Bellville, in close proximity to Cape Town, South Africa.

The main theme was "People, Place, and Policy for Community Wellness" People: community, professionals, partnerships, and interpersonal, Place: rural and urban, global north and global south. The Subthemes were:

- Building Equity for Rural Health
- Community Engagement for Local and Global Health
- Social and Health Policies for the Public Good
- Educating the Health Workforce

The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) is an international, intersectoral, intergenerational organization that fosters equitable community-oriented health services, education, and research with the goal of improving health locally and globally. It convenes innovative health care organizations, universities, community institutions, and thought leaders from all over the world.

Rural WONCA (The Working Party on Rural Practice) is an active network of rural family doctors and rural academics from each of the world's regions: Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Australasia/Pacific. Members of the working party are engaged and active in contributing to the vision of "Health for All Rural People" globally through: Repositioning and relationships, Education and Research, Activism and Advocacy and Conferencing and Communication.

The conference was attended by 346 participants and 72 virtual participants form 45 countries. A rich program was put together with 39 workshops, 184 oral presentations, 5 Ubuntu Documentaries, 16 Ubuntu Talks and 43 free paper sessions as well 4 keynote speakers. One of the key highlights of the conference is the site visits; there were 17 sites from which the participants chose. These showcased the work that is being done in the Western Cape, one of the provinces in South Africa. There was a variety so one was spoiled for choice, from community centers, community and projects, centers for the blind, deaf and people with disabilities.

This was all crowned off by the Ubuntu 2024 declaration which emphasized the concept of Ubuntu as a humanist African philosophy that derives from a profound Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (a person is a person because of other people), this emphasises the intrinsic connection among people, asserting that a person becomes complete through their relationship with others. Ubuntuism underscores the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence, weaving together spiritual dimensions, collective and personal identities, familial inclusivity, and the profound value of interpersonal bonds.

The "Ubuntu 2024 Declaration" emphasizes the interconnectedness of people, place, and policy in fostering health and wellness, focusing on four key themes:

- Building Equity in Rural Health: Prioritizing equity, the declaration calls for equitable distribution of health resources across rural areas, adequate funding for primary healthcare, and development of a well-distributed, diverse rural health workforce. Actions include community involvement in policy-making, immersive education in rural settings, and addressing research gaps and emergency preparedness.
- Community Engagement for Local and Global Health: The declaration highlights the importance of community engagement, urging the development of community capacity, public-private partnerships, and culturally relevant education. It emphasizes community involvement in chronic disease management, mental health support, and climate change mitigation, promoting a collaborative approach to future public health emergencies.
- Social and Health Policies for the Public Good: Policies should promote social justice, address health inequities, and integrate social determinants of health, climate change, and planetary health. The declaration advocates for co-created, inclusive policies reflecting the needs of marginalized communities, with a focus on sustainability, resilience, and health advocacy.
- Educating the Health Workforce: Emphasizing interprofessional education, the declaration calls for curricula that address climate change, digital health, and community engagement. It highlights the importance of training health workers in rural settings and supporting community-based health workers. Education models should incorporate technology while maintaining core values of communication and continuity.

The declaration urges stakeholders to implement these recommendations locally, address fundamental service inequities, and collaborate with organizations like The Network: TUFH and Rural WONCA to measure progress and impact.

Elsi Kigul-Malwadde, past Secretary General, The Network TUFH