

WHR2003 MIP SUMMARY

The World Health Report 2003: Shaping the Future will be published on December 18, 2003. The report spans a wide range of issues. Its main theme is the urgent need to strengthen health systems, particularly in the poorest countries, in order to make significant gains in health.

Chapter One examines the latest global health trends and finds disturbing evidence of widening gaps in health worldwide. In 2002, life expectancy at birth fell back to less than 46 years for men in sub-Saharan Africa, largely because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Millions of children today, particularly in Africa, have less chance of surviving until their fifth birthday than was the case a decade ago. Meanwhile, a global increase in noncommunicable diseases is to the daunting challenges already facing many developing countries.

Chapter Two reviews the progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which place health at the heart of development. Three of the eight goals are directly health-related; all of the others have important indirect effects on health. This chapter tracks the progress so far towards achieving them and warns that without significantly strengthened commitments from both wealthy and developing countries, the goals will not be met globally.

Chapter Three is concerned with HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was declared a major global health emergency by the Director-General on September 22, 2003. This chapter describes the WHO “3 by 5 initiative” to provide antiretroviral treatment to millions of those most in need, and suggests an aggressive strategy for global action against the pandemic that unites the efforts of WHO and its partners from many sectors.

Chapter Four deals with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, one of the largest public health efforts in history. The number of endemic countries has fallen from over 125 to seven. This chapter records the final phase of the campaign and looks forward to a polio-free world.

Chapter Five chronicles the emergence of SARS as a deadly new disease in 2003, and describes its rapid containment. It discusses the consequences of the outbreaks in human and economic terms and says the international response to SARS will shape future strategies against other infectious epidemics.

Chapter Six examines the spread of three very different epidemics in developing countries. Today, the burden of deaths and disability in developing countries caused by noncommunicable diseases, particularly cardiovascular conditions, outweighs that imposed by long-standing communicable diseases. To tackle this well-recognized “double burden”, this chapter proposes a “double response” which integrates prevention and control of both communicable diseases and noncommunicable diseases within a comprehensive health care system.

The chapter also examines the globalization of tobacco-related diseases and the role of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in countering this epidemic. Meanwhile, the “hidden epidemic” of road traffic casualties and traffic-related environmental hazards can be reduced if developing countries adapt successful road safety and other improvements from elsewhere to meet their own needs.

Chapter Seven says there is an urgent need to strengthen health systems. This reinforcement should be based on the core principles of primary health care as outlined at Alma-Ata in 1978: universal access and coverage on the basis of need; health equity as part of development oriented to social justice; community participation in defining and implementing health agendas; and intersectoral approaches to health. These principles remain valid, but must be reinterpreted in the light of dramatic changes in the health field during the past 25 years.

Four important issues that health systems must confront are examined: the global health workforce crisis, inadequate health information, lack of financial resources, and the stewardship challenge of implementing pro-equity health policies in a pluralistic environment. WHO is committed to working with countries to support health system strengthening.

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