

Statement on realizing the potential of primary health care in the post-COVID-19 era

Brussels, 3rd of September 2021

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly emphasised the importance of a comprehensive, efficient and accessible approach to Primary Health Care. We applaud the commitment of the World Health Assembly to apply the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to develop PHC services that are result-oriented and inclusive for all. As the European Medical Students Association (EMSA) we firmly stand for access to healthcare as a fundamental human right and welcome the described concept of PHC services free of charge and the potential of expanding to include the coverage of medicines for PHC.

PHC services hold immense potential in educating patients about nutrition, disease prevention, vaccination and many more issues related to public health, fostering health literacy and ultimately having the potential to decrease long-term cost and strain on the national healthcare sector as a whole. PHC professionals are oftentimes first responders to mental health issues, especially during recent months which have exponentially exacerbated existing strains on patients' mental health. IEMSA calls for the tailored training of PHC professionals to be able to adequately respond to mental health concerns of patients.

EMSA would like to emphasise the opportunity to include medical students in their final years into primary healthcare services as part of their training - something that is already successfully implemented in some Member States. This organised inclusion of medical students has the potential to alleviate strain on PHC professionals while aiding in the education of future healthcare professionals. It could furthermore serve as an incentive for students to specialise in fields associated with PHC.

EMSA welcomes the proposal of increased partnerships within local communities and the inclusion of civil societies as well as patients and carers in discussions. We would like to emphasise the potential positive impact of including non-governmental medical student representatives as well as faculty representatives within discussions surrounding the improvement of PHC services on a regional, national and international level in the spirit of social accountability of medical students and medical faculties.

With variants of different diseases as well as other humanitarian crises on the rise globally, the healthcare sector as a whole as well as the PHC services specifically have to be strengthened now more than ever in order to be best prepared for what is to come - within the ongoing pandemic as well as beyond.



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