Strengthening Community and Frontline Health Workers for Universal Health Coverage

International Council of Nurses and the World Bank Group
Event Summary
July 2014

The commitment to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity are central to the collaboration between the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the World Bank Group (the Bank). To achieve UHC, it is postulated that an effective Human Resources for Health (HRH) strategy will require optimizing on community-based primary health care, and building an integrated team approach that engages community members, community health workers, health professionals, and workers from other disciplines. Many countries across the globe are exploring various approaches based on this model, but there is considerable scope for improving evidence. To address this issue, ICN and the Bank convened a two-day dialogue on July 21-22nd. The dialogue, hosted by St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, Canada, brought together participants from global organizations, educational institutions and nursing organizations, with multidisciplinary expertise in health care delivery, education, economics, and health system research and management.

With over 16 million globally, nurses are educated and prepared to support health and care needs across the full continuum of health, illness, rehabilitative and end of life. Nurses are practitioners, educators, researchers and administrators who are instrumental to advancing innovations and solutions to address health system challenges. Yet participants agreed that nurses are sub-optimally utilized in care delivery, management and policy settings, and are not deployed to full scope in many environments that would stand to benefit from integrated team-based approaches. Thus, participants considered how to more effectively leverage the knowledge and expertise of nurses to strengthen community involvement and the role of community health workers and multidisciplinary teams in achieving optimum health outcomes.

In the course of the two-days, a number of potential leading practices, innovations and partnerships were identified to address the implications of shifting toward community-based primary health care along the following dimensions: (i) health workforce education and development; (ii) flexible models of care; (iii) regulation and public protection; and (iv) employment generation and development opportunities. Participants highlighted the importance of person-centered and community driven orientation to all interventions. They also emphasized the benefits of integrating robust measurement and evaluation as a core component of interventions as a means of advancing tested and proven solutions.

ICN and the World Bank acknowledged the value of continuing the dialogue in informing their future collaboration, and agreed to explore various initiatives at global, national and regional levels. These collaborative initiatives will include technical support for capacity building, the development of knowledge products, and consultation to support project development and implementation in order to advance HRH initiatives that will support low and middle income countries achieve UHC.