



AAFP Statement on Global Health

GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

According to the 2008 WHO World Health Report, the substantial progress in health over the recent decades has been deeply unequal with a considerable number of countries increasingly lagging behind or losing ground. Global health needs continue to persist and remain a harsh reality. Millions of people are infected annually with tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and HIV. Maternal mortality is unacceptably high in countries with limited resources and millions of children around the world suffer and die from largely preventable and treatable conditions and malnutrition. The increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases in all parts of the world, including resource constrained countries, directly impacts the global health paradigm. There is a critical shortage of health workers and professionals in more than 50 countries.

GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

International organizations, donors and high-income nations have recognized the need to increase support for global health to enhance the prospects for economic prosperity, stability and security for all nations. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) agrees that there is an urgent need to improve global health. Previously undertaken global health initiatives including the global program on smallpox eradication, Roll Back Malaria, Stop TB, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, and Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria have been predominantly vertical or disease-specific programs. While understanding the importance of the above programs to mitigate the impact of those diseases, the AAFP strongly believes that without an effective health care system based on family medicine primary care, any gains in disease treatment and control are likely to be short-lived.

The recent announcement of a coordinated Global Health Initiative for U.S. government agencies addressing global health is a step forward for providing comprehensive health assistance in resource limited nations. The intent to coordinate the provision of global health services for many diseases and combine the efforts across many agencies will enhance the ability of the United States to deliver effective services in the fight against global malaria, tuberculosis, uncommon tropical diseases and HIV/AIDS. Federal agencies working in a coordinated fashion provide opportunities for greater attention to strengthening the health delivery systems in resource constrained countries.

ROLE OF PRIMARY CARE IN GLOBAL HEALTH SERVICES

Family medicine primary health care is the foundation of an effective health care system. Skilled, competent human resources for health are essential to deliver primary health care services. Family physicians are pivotal members who are able to enhance the quality, scope, and cost-effectiveness of primary health care teams.

The AAFP and its members are on the front lines of efforts to improve primary health care services in the United States. The AAFP has also been increasingly working with local leaders in the resource constrained countries to enhance health care services abroad. The AAFP believes that family physicians are a vital resource needed to shape global health initiatives to improve health services in the U.S. and throughout the world. The purpose of this statement is to articulate the core principles endorsed by the AAFP for global health system development and to delineate the ways that the Academy and its members can enhance the improvement of health systems in other nations.

PRINCIPLES ENDORSED BY THE AAFP FOR GLOBAL HEALTH SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

The American Academy of Family Physicians believes that effective family medicine primary care is the bedrock for the delivery of health care both in the United States and in other nations. In developing a functional primary health care infrastructure, seven key principles are essential to achieve a culturally acceptable system that can function within the resources and demands of each nation:

- All people of the world regardless of social, economic and political status, race, religion or gender should have access to basic health care services.
- Social justice and equity and the rights and responsibilities of nation states need to be balanced.
- Health systems are complex systems that have developed in response to unique local histories, values, circumstances and resources.
- It is the responsibility of each country to determine the organization and priorities of its own health system, based on local needs and available resources.
- International exchanges of family physicians and family medicine consultants are an important part of global health development.
- International consultations are intended to enable countries to better satisfy their own health care needs within their local context, resources, and culture.
- Integrity, transparency and collaboration should characterize international consultations to develop or improve health systems.

CALL TO ACTION

The American Academy of Family Physicians and its members are committed to care that is equitable and accessible for all people. Aspiring to transform health care to achieve optimal health for everyone, the AAFP thereby contributes to promoting health and enhancing the quality of life of people everywhere. Ignoring public health challenges beyond the U.S. borders would be irresponsible and detrimental to global progress. Support from and collaboration with other nations and multilateral partners has the potential to result in improved health globally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The AAFP recommends that current and future global health initiatives focus health system development on family medicine primary care services in resource constrained countries.

Numerous studies and the 2008 WHO World Health Report have shown that health systems based on a primary care foundation provide more efficient and effective health services for their nations and are best able to meet the principles articulated by the AAFP for equity and social justice. The AAFP pledges to support the global health programs that enhance the development of primary care health systems and necessary healthcare workforce in those regions.

2. The AAFP recommends that current and future global health initiatives invest in building efficient family medicine primary care health care systems in resource constrained countries.

The ability to deliver the necessary health care services to promote health and prevent diseases hinges on a functional health system. Without a functional health system, not only will the delivery of acute and comprehensive services be hindered, but the sustainability of these efforts will be challenged. The AAFP urges the government programs operating under the umbrella of global health initiatives to include funding to develop sustainable health care systems and human resources for health in every program that provides services in countries of need.

3. The AAFP shall support global health initiatives by encouraging the generation and transfer of evidence-based information, technologies and best practices relevant to global health challenges in resource constrained nations.

The AAFP pledges to share its expertise and that of its members, as appropriate, by providing access to its educational products and services.

4. The AAFP shall support global health initiatives to leverage collaboration with other nations and multilateral partners.

The AAFP will commit to fostering collaboration and institutional partnerships with global family medicine primary health care leaders and organizations by supporting the World Organization of Family Doctors (Wonca) and encouraging more initiatives and innovative approaches to the collaboration within and among regional Wonca networks and member-organizations.

SUMMARY

The American Academy of Family Physicians supports global health efforts to promote health, develop professionals and support altruism through creating synergies and avoiding competition with global and local partners. The AAFP shares resources in the spirit of true humility, and promotes transparency and accountability. The AAFP and its members should serve as key resources in implementing this mission and in developing stable and equitable health delivery systems across the world.

Approved by the AAFP Board of Directors, July 2011