

Role of Medical Schools in Sustainable Development Goals

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launched in 2015 by United Nations as an agenda for integrated and equitable growth for every one comprises of seventeen goals based on five essential pillars People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. These goals deal with four distinct areas social (SDGs 1–6), economic (SDGs 7–11), environmental (SDGs 12–15) and law and governance (SDGs 16 and 17). To keep track of progress on these goals, 169 targets and 213 macroeconomic indicators have been formulated.

Different countries may employ different strategies to ensure effective implementation based on their resources and existing infrastructure. However better results can be produced through sharing of financial resources between countries, formulation of policies at national level, simplifying funding procedures with equitable distribution and having a dependable and trusting relationship between different stake holders. COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical situations and drastic impact of climate change have significantly slowed down work on SDGs world over.

Medical schools as an integral part of health care system can make significant contribution towards achieving these goals through improvement and reforms in their curricula, reorienting their education, research and service priorities, strengthening governance, providing a comfortable working environment and developing partnerships with other stakeholders. Most of the targets and indicators of goal 3 and some of 2nd, 4th and 5th goals are already a part of medical curriculum but they need to be taught with a more practical and contextual approach.

Goal 2: - End Hunger

This goal requires universal access to safe and nutritious food and improved nutrition through sustainable agriculture. Its targets are to reduce stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons (Watts et al., 2017). Courses about nutrition including nutritional

requirements, diagnosis, management of malnourishment should be a part of medical curriculum. Organizing community field trips for students will also help gauge the severity of the problem. Teaching food adulteration, food borne diseases and counselling of mothers regarding breast feeding and infant nutrition can act as effective preventive measures.

Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Wellbeing for all at all ages

Access to the best attainable standards of health is the fundamental right of every human being. In order to achieve this target, lacuna within health care system needs to be filled through effective policy making at government and administrative level, preparing healthcare professionals for leadership roles so that they can exert their influence beyond their work place and have a positive impact on the health status of the community. Goal 3 deals with controlling maternal and newborn mortality, communicable and non-communicable diseases, reproductive health, environmental pollution and provision of effective health coverage for all including vaccination

A child's right to health is inclusive and all children should have equal opportunities to survive, grow and develop. This right should not be undermined by discrimination or maltreatment which may contribute to his / her vulnerability. Reproductive health is an important aspect of health and wellbeing and it is every individual right to have effective access to sexual and reproductive health care. There is a dire need to create awareness and sensitize health care professionals and communities about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), with the aim to equip and empower children, adolescents and women with knowledge, attitudes and values so that they can actively take care of their health, well-being and dignity (WHO: Top 10 Causes of Death, 2017).

Communicable and non-communicable diseases are responsible for a major chunk of global disease burden, especially in developing countries with serious economic repercussions for the entire world. Risk factors for these disease are interrelated and rooted in social, political, economic, cultural, environmental and commercial factors, effective and context specific interventions for these diseases (WHO: Risk Factors, 2019). Medical curriculum should be designed to create awareness about commonly occurring diseases, understanding the risk factors, prevention, management and the importance

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of an effective vaccination program. This will not only reduce mortality and morbidity but also the exhaustion of financial resource.

Goal 4: Quality Education

Provision of higher educational opportunities for women can help to alleviate poverty and slow down population growth. In Pakistan female students make up about 70 % of the total admissions in medical colleges but female doctors comprise of less than 50 % of practicing doctors (Ismail, Khan and Hameed, 2022). This is largely due to sociocultural reasons but organizational culture and working hours also have a role. This imbalance can be corrected by providing a safe and supportive environment in medical colleges and hospitals so that female doctors can pursue their career choices freely and without external pressures. These opportunities will not only empower women financially but also allow them to make choices regarding their reproductive health and family size.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Every individual is entitled to a health system that protects and grants equal opportunities to everyone. Women and individuals who do not follow established gender norms are more vulnerable to gender inequality. Unfortunately, gender inequality is seen in various social determinants of health, including levels of exposure to disease and injury; investment in nutrition, care and education as well as access to and utilization of health services.

Providing easy access to health care facilities, setting up of facilitation centers for reproductive health and breast clinic for early diagnosis will go a long way in reducing gender inequality.

It is important that health care professionals be equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills and values to ensure quality of healthcare delivery, promoting health equity, cost-effective use of resources and building strong relevance between medical education and society.

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