

Making health a top priority

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Making health a top priority: Commitment from all of us is needed to convince the rest of us

Wayne Kines, President, World Media Institute

What is missing from this debate so far that is essential to achieving a healthy world? Nowhere is there a document addressing the problem represented by those political leaders and billions of ordinary citizens who consider priorities other than health as being more important, except perhaps, when their own health deteriorates.

Those millions who work in the health field may consider health as the most important social goal for themselves, their community and their nation. But they are a minority and not always a persuasive minority. Because they are so preoccupied with the health problems confronting them, they are not spending time convincing the vast majority of the world's policy-makers and opinion-molders that health should be the first common cause of humanity. Nurses, doctors, other health workers and ordinary citizens concerned with health have yet to persuade others — who are not concerned with and committed to health — that they should be.

The UN General Assembly, in 1969, adopted a Resolution (the first to be unanimous in 20 years) calling for "Mobilization of Public Opinion for Economic and Social Development." This Resolution led to collaborative action by the UN family of Agencies and Programmes (joining with government information leaders of UN Member States and communication strategists of business and civil society) to promote the goal of universal economic and social development to be accepted throughout the world community. In the subsequent year, the UN General Assembly declared a "Development Decade" and launched a worldwide multi-faceted effort to raise the level of human prosperity everywhere.

These strategic approaches are needed again now for the subject of health. WHO's Director General, Dr. Margaret Chan — while leading the global actions of all those devoted to improving health conditions in the world — is also calling for health to be the priority of everyone else, including leaders of government and every citizen who has a vote and a voice and who is able to speak up for the health of the world.

So, where do we go now? Do we need a Resolution for adoption by the UN/GA 2009, launching a campaign in 2010 that will mobilize public opinion worldwide in support of health as the priority goal of every Member State? Yes, such a Resolution well-implemented could bring about a unity of purpose and campaign to convince non-believers that health should be humanity's first priority. Without a worldwide public campaign to persuade those who have priorities other than the health of their family and community, the world health sector will continue to be underfunded, understaffed, undervalued and unable to achieve the needed goals.

Declaring and effectively implementing a "UN Decade for a Healthy World, from 2011 to 2020" could advance our present slow progress in helping millions of people to become stronger, healthier citizens. But, such a Decade would fail to reach the billions of people who need to be involved in the improvement of health in their own communities and nations, unless those now committed actively convince and persuade those who do not yet treat health as a personal priority of their heart and mind.

"Making Health a Top Priority" – W. Kines

The Nightingale Initiative for Global Health (NIGH) seeks to inform and involve nurses and other health workers in celebrating 2010 as the International Year of the Nurse. They intend it as a global celebration of commitment to launch the "UN Decade for a Healthy World, 2011-2020";

Nurses are the backbone of global health, and more than 15 million of them working wherever there is suffering in today's world. They are busy, dedicated people. Their caring talents are respected and legendary. Until now, their time and talents for public persuasion have not been so strongly focused.

Nurses, other health workers and those convinced that health should be humanity's new first priority are actively seeking to persuade the United Nations ECOSOC and General Assembly to debate, decide, adopt and implement a program of action to raise public awareness and mobilize opinion to achieve a healthy world. This is paving the road for the adoption of a "UN Decade for a Healthy World, 2011-2020," including a World Summit for Global Health producing a universal action plan to improve the health of all citizens, further enlisting everyone's positive contributions to the global community on the road to 2020.

So, "yes!" we need a UN International Year of the Nurse in 2010 to help nurses bring humanity's most serious health problems to the attention of the global community. These then can be addressed by the united actions of UN Member States and resolved in the ensuing Decade for a Healthy World.

A "UN Resolution to Mobilize Public Opinion for Universal Human Health" is now needed and so is the UN General Assembly's endorsement of the International Year of the Nurse in 2010 to be the launching pad for a UN Decade for a Healthy World, 2011-2020. But – unless it is a decade that impinges on the conscience and actions of every citizen in the global community – raising consciousness, increasing awareness, releasing resources and mobilizing personal commitment to a healthy world – it will fail to deliver the maximum needed and many will die who could otherwise have made the earth a better place.

With the upcoming session of the 2009 UN ECOSOC, now is the time to put these steps in place: Recommend a UNGA Resolution to Mobilize Public Opinion for Universal Health, Endorse and Participate in a UN International Year of the Nurse, 2010, and Adopt and Implement a UN Decade for a Healthy World, 2011-2020.

Kind regards,

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