

WHA72: PATIENT SAFETY: WASH IN HEALTH FACILITIES RESOLUTION EB144.R5 (EB 2019)

ITEM 12.5

IntraHealth International endorses the collective vision whereby every health care facility has functional WASH services and practices that enable essential, quality health services for everyone, everywhere. Unfortunately, we are far from achieving that vision, and these failings are undermining the promise of universal health coverage and renewed efforts on primary health care.

As noted in the director-general's report, adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene in health facilities are critical to quality care and infection prevention, yet too many health facilities still don't meet basic standards. Earlier this year, the WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme found a staggering 45% of health facilities in the least-developed countries have no clean water on site. These circumstances present unacceptable risks to frontline health workers and their patients. An estimated 15% of patients develop one or more infections during a hospital stay, and sepsis causes approximately 6 million deaths every year. Recurrent infections due to poor WASH also result in increased prophylactic use of antibiotics, contributing to antimicrobial resistance. Unsafe and unhygienic conditions in health facilities also negatively affect health workers' dignity and safety as well as attendance, performance, and retention.

Last year, the UN Secretary-General issued a global call to action to improve WASH in all health facilities, and WHO and UNICEF are leading a coordinated response and action plan. While incremental progress has been made, ongoing challenges include poor sector coordination between the WASH and health sectors, a lack of political will and financing, and inadequate infrastructure and health worker training.

Member state support, prioritization, and commitment are needed to achieve change at the scale needed to meet the SDGs. IntraHealth and the Frontline Health Workers Coalition thanks the US government for co-sponsoring this resolution and urges continued leadership by all member states to improving WASH in health facilities through sustained leadership, cross-sector action, and health systems strengthening.

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