INTRAHEALTH INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT AT 70TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

May 2017

12.1 HEALTH EMERGENCIES

IntraHealth International, a US-based NGO committed to strengthening the health workforce and health systems worldwide, supported by the Frontline Health Workers Coalition, applauds the WHO's efforts to convene a range of stakeholders to ensure a more efficient, coordinated approach to sending health workers abroad for surge capacity during health emergencies. However, the report on health workforce coordination in emergencies lacks concrete plans to strengthen capacity, coordination, and support for local frontline health workers in emergency settings. We recommend any workforce coordination efforts include an equally fervent push to address long-term, systematic needs. As we saw during much of the Ebola epidemic in 2014-2015, international support for the needs of local health workers in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone was woefully inadequate. Frontline health workers are the first line of defense against disease threats, and their heroic sacrifices should be met with honor, compassion and support for their efforts. We urge Member States to commit to investments in equipment, training, effective management, and financial support for the retention of health workers to ensure that each community has the workforce needed to save lives, and the robust systems required to support those workers in detecting, analyzing, and responding to new and emerging public health threats.

Furthermore, the increase in deliberate attacks on health care is dire, with hundreds of such attacks taking place in 23 countries in 2016 alone. WHO is implementing a system to report on the protection of health workers through the Monitoring Events Against Safe Use and Running of Health Services system. The work of monitoring attacks on health is more critical than ever, and IntraHealth and the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition urge the WHO and Member States to swiftly progress with the monitoring system's implementation.

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