

Opening Remarks

By
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Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

At

***Regional Consultation of Medical Councils in WHO South-
East Asia Region***

Thimphu, Bhutan
17-19 October 2006

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H.E. Lyonpo Sonam Tobgay, Honourable Chief Justice;

H.E. Lyonpo Jigmi Singay, Minister of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan;

Excellencies;

Distinguished participants;

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this important Regional Consultation. It is the first meeting of its kind to be held in WHO South-East Asia Region. I thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for agreeing to host the meeting in this beautiful and tranquil city of Thimphu.

I would like to extend my special thanks to the Ministry of Health of Bhutan for the excellent arrangements made by them for the meeting. We have very much enjoyed the warm welcome and courteous reception by the Bhutanese people. Certainly, I am grateful to the distinguished participants

for their interest and for having taken out time to attend this meeting. It is an indication that this meeting will take us a long way forward towards the improvement and development of medical councils in countries of the Region. This is also a special occasion for us to visit this very peaceful country.

A medical council is an important body contributing to the improvement of quality and adequacy of medical care and services. Its role extends into various important areas, particularly in medical education and practice. Furthermore, its involvement in the development and management of medical services in a country is indeed very well recognized. The role of a medical council has been evolving over time, according to the dynamic changes occurring in the society. Consumers are increasingly demanding more and better services; this demand is often expressed through the political process. Also, patients' awareness of their rights for more efficient and effective health care is on the increase, while the consumers are demanding a higher degree of ethical consideration in medical practices. Advancement in medical sciences has changed the way medicine is perceived and practised. With countries becoming more developed, the behaviours and lifestyles of people are changing in many ways. These changes, in one way or the other, are affecting the role of medical councils with regard to protecting the health of consumers.

Several countries in the South-East Asia Region already have medical councils. However, these councils are at different stages of development. Moreover, their roles may not be the same. Some are backed up by the required legislation, which vests them with a legal mandate. At the same time, some are in the process of acquiring the necessary authority for their effective functioning. However, some countries do not have a medical council yet. The main aim of this meeting is to stimulate the development and strengthening of medical council in countries of the Region. This would facilitate the exchange of information and experiences among participating councils. It will also promote further development of medical councils through intercountry cooperation among interested parties. Certainly, WHO will always be ready to facilitate and catalyse such cooperation. Countries which are yet to form medical councils have also been invited to attend this Consultation.

I am confident that the meeting will certainly benefit these countries in their efforts to move forward in the development of medical councils. Through dialogue and partnerships, countries with well-developed medical councils can help those countries whose councils need to be strengthened further. Moreover, countries that are yet to have medical councils will learn from the more developed ones. This Consultation is being organized at the request of a medical council of one of the countries in the Region. It being an important idea, I accepted at once. I thank the particular council for a very useful and important initiation. In the course of this meeting, we will

also present the experiences and good practices in the development and management of medical councils around the world.

I thank Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhury for his dedicated efforts to compile useful information for this meeting. In addition, the meeting will also touch on some other issues of importance to the functioning of medical councils, such as: (i) Reciprocal recognition and equivalence of medical degrees; (ii) Evolving trends in improving the quality of medical education, and (iii) Legislation and registration for clinical practice.

A medical council is part of the medical services delivery in countries. It is therefore an integral component of a national health system. The council has to play its role within a vast area, encompassing many important fields; scientific/technical, socio-cultural, legal and political. It has to interact with a wide-range of stakeholders, including academic institutions and professional bodies. The role of medical council in contributing to the quality and adequacy of medical care and services is indeed challenging. The development of a medical council needs strong professional leadership. And it needs unwavering support from other players, not only in medical, but also in other related fields. Political blessing and commitment are really indispensable; without these, medical councils will not be able to develop their status up to the desired level. Within national context, a medical council is an important mechanism to help coordinate the work of various players in the medical arena.

The development of such councils has to be energetically encouraged in countries. I hope that this meeting will have a significant impact on the work being undertaken in this direction at the country level. This meeting can act as an international platform to facilitate joint planning towards effectively achieving our common objectives in this regard. As an outcome of this Consultation, I would also like to see that a regional network of medical councils is formed to ensure long-term collaboration among these councils. WHO stands ready to support the development and functioning of such a network.

In conclusion I wish the meeting all success.

And I wish that you all have an enjoyable stay in Thimphu.

Thank you.