Experience with Accreditation of Health Professionals’ Education in the South-East Asia Region: Expert workshop
Summary Report
14-15 February 2018, Bangkok, Thailand

Background
As part of region-wide efforts to advance Universal Health Coverage, Member States in the South-East Asia Region have committed to a Decade of Strengthening HRH, 2015 – 2024, with a focus on transformative education and rural retention. Accreditation of health professional training institutions is one of eleven WHO recommendations on ways to transform and scale up health professionals education and training in its 2013 education guidelines. This recommendation was rated strong despite the quality of evidence being rated low, because high value was placed on “an uncertain but potentially important impact on both quality and relevance of the health workforce”. It is one of the milestones in the new WHO Global Health Workforce Strategy 2030: “by 2020 all countries have established accreditation mechanism for health training institutions”.

16 participants with a wide variety of expertise in accreditation of health professionals education (academicians, representatives of nursing and medical councils, heads of independent accreditation bodies and officials from ministry of health and ministry of education) from five SEAR countries (India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh) participated in this workshop.

Before attending the workshop experts completed a survey on accreditation for their respective countries.

Overview of Programme

Day 1: Setting the scene; taking stock
- Why this workshop on accreditation of health professionals’ education in SEAR?
- What have been the progress, challenges and impact on health professionals’ education in Thailand, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh?
- What has been the experience on health professionals’ education from low-mid level income countries outside the Region? What is their possible relevance to SEAR?

Day 2: Going forward
- Group work:
  - What are the lessons learnt from each other’s accreditation systems?
  - What are the next steps in each country?
- Regional next steps
- Conclusions

Workshop objectives
1. Clarify the concept, purpose and scope of accreditation of health training institutions, and review international experience.
2. Exchange knowledge, and experience with progress and challenges in implementation of accreditation of health professionals’ education in SEAR;
3. Identify ways overcoming the challenges of the implementation of accreditation of health professionals’ education in SEAR, through individual and collective action.

Issues raised:
1. Need to be clear about different terms, and their meanings

Thailand and Indonesia use the term “accreditation”. India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh use the term “recognition” for processes of review and approval that have some similarities with accreditation but also significant differences. Recently the term accreditation has increasingly been introduced in the latter countries by the Ministry of Education and by universities. Despite the different use of terminology a common definition of accreditation of health education institutions was agreed:

“A process of review and approval by an accreditation body for which an institution or programme is granted time-limited recognition of having met certain established standards”

A clear distinction was also established between accreditation and licensing/registration. Accreditation refers to institutions and programmes and licensing/registration to individuals.
2. Accreditation in the five countries

Two clear patterns on accreditation were identified among the five countries:

- Indonesia and Thailand have recently introduced independent accreditation bodies, recognized by law.
- Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh continue with their previous systems of recognition through the health professionals councils.

Within these two groups there are also some singularities:

1. Indonesia: accreditation of institutions and programmes is carried out by two different independent bodies. Accreditation of institutions is carried out by the National Accreditation Board and accreditation of programmes is carried out by the Indonesia Accreditation Agency for Higher Education for Health.
2. Thailand: accreditation of institutions and programmes is carried out by the same independent body (Institute for Medical Education Accreditation).
3. India: in addition to the health professionals councils there is a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) under Ministry of Research. Only a few health education institutions have gone through the accreditation process since it is voluntary.
4. Bangladesh: it is in the process of passing a bill to create a University accrediting agency and has also drafted an act to create an independent accreditation body for accreditation of health programmes.
5. Sri Lanka is not in the process of developing an independent accreditation agency yet.

Conclusions

- Accreditation is a mechanism to achieve quality in health education but it is not an end in itself.
- Terminology is important. “Accreditation” is frequently used in Thailand and Indonesia whereas “recognition” is frequently used in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- Accreditation refers to institutions and programmes and licensing/registration to individuals.
- There are two clear patterns among the 5 countries: Indonesia and Thailand have recently introduced independent accreditation bodies, whereas India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh rely on health professional councils for recognition.
- Accreditation should not be limited to medicine and nursing but to other health professions.

Next steps:

1. Analyse experience with accreditation systems in other SEAR countries:
   a. Include one session on accreditation during the SEAR HRH meeting to be held in June.
   b. Include one whole day session on accreditation during the AAAH meeting in Vietnam (November 2018).
2. Include accreditation in the 2018 report on progress of the Decade for Strengthening HRH.
3. Facilitate exchange of experiences among countries:
   a. Produce a paper on accreditation in SEAR by end of 2018.
   b. Provide good quality support when requested.
      (i) Participants as a network. Thailand and Indonesia can provide good technical support and share their experience with other SEAR countries.
4. WFME standards should be shaped to fully reflect country context (Sri Lanka to review WFME standards from a PHC perspective).
5. SEARAME executive meeting will be held in May 2018. Include accreditation in the agenda for further discussion.