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Health Evidence Network (HEN)

“Assessing future health workforce needs”

Key messages

- The choice of a strategy to assess the future health workforce (HW) is value-based and depends on what health outcomes and service objectives policy-makers have set.
- Various models, approaches and toolkits have been proposed and tried over the years by international agencies, as well as by individual countries.
- Workforce situation analysis for determining future staff requirements typically builds upon variables such as expected population growth, technological and social change, skills mix, individual performance and health policy.
- There is little benefit in educating adequate numbers of doctors or nurses, and then seeing them migrate to other countries because the labour market cannot integrate them, or because working conditions are not attractive enough.
- Assessing future HW needs is not only about projecting the numbers. Policy-makers need also to address the issues of recruiting, educating, distributing, retaining, motivating and managing the HW, which implies improving the knowledge about the expectations and behaviours of health workers.
- Addressing needs implies more than producing more workers; scaling up can be achieved by improving competences, changing skills mix, and by augmenting productivity.
- It is important to see HW planning as a process that engages the main stakeholders in assessing needs for change and in devising strategies to achieve those changes.
- The better the information base and the technical capacity to use it, the better the diagnosis and the selection of interventions will be.
- Monitoring is essential to adjust interventions to a changing environment.
- Sufficient and predictable funding must be available to invest in workforce development. The benefits will soon be apparent in terms of better access to services, more efficient utilization of resources and higher satisfaction of citizens.

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