

## EDITORIAL

## Health Workforce: A Critical Challenge in Health System of Bangladesh

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The health workforce is the key and the most valuable input to the health system. A competent health workforce is critical to a well-functioning health system. The health workforce should be appropriate in relation to number, skill-mix, and distribution with optimum competency to deliver the services, aimed at developing an effective, efficient, and equitable health system for meeting the goal of improved and equitable population health.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has developed a health workforce strategy in 2015 with the objectives to ensure the availability of a competent and adequate number of workforces as per the health system's needs, and to produce, develop and sustain a quality health workforce at all level.<sup>2</sup>

The role of health workforce in achieving health indicators of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) demands focused investment and policy for its development.

Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her message to the National Health Policy 2011 (NHP 2011) mentioned that human resources for health are universally recognized important indicator for development. NHP 2011 identified Bangladesh having a critical shortage of health workers and commented that patients receive first care from un-skilled service providers. The main objective relates to the health workforce in the NHP 2011 is the modernisation and updating of all doctors, nurses, medical technologists, and health allied workforce as per the needs of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Health, Nutrition and Population Strategic Investment Plan (HNPSIP) 2016-2023 mentioned that health workforce development predominantly involves

institutional education before entering the services.<sup>4</sup> The quality of education in these institutions both in the public and private sectors is mostly challenged by a shortage of qualified teachers. Improved quality of medical education across all health professionals' institutions and modernisation and transformation of the medical education system to fulfill the aspirations of the SDG and achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is now a major priority. Quality, standardisation, and accreditation issues remain major challenges. Building capacity and skills within the workforce is an area requiring considerable attention. The 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025 recorded that the MoHFW would focus on improving the quality of public and private pre-service health workforce education system to produce a need-based health workforce for the country.<sup>5</sup>

In Bangladesh, health worker density was 7.4 per 10,000 population, and the distribution of physician: nurse: health technologist was 1:0.5:0.2 in 2014. The density has now increased to 9.9 per 10,000 population and the distribution is 1:0.6:0.3 in 2019. Health worker density needs to be raised to 44.5 per 10,000 and the distribution, to be raised to 1:3:5 by the year 2030. Bangladesh is facing a critical challenge in producing a health workforce with the appropriate ratio to complement the improved health care services for the population.

Physicians are the leading health professionals and are critically important to the health care delivery system. The posts for medical officers and specialist physicians at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in the public health system in Bangladesh are not adequate for the population of the country. The demand and supply of specialist medical doctors are not addressed or evaluated properly. Imbalance exists due to doctors' interests in some particular speciality and inertia in others. So, there are a higher number of specialists' productions in some specialties, whereas less production in others. This hampers the need-based service delivery systems and career pathways of the physicians.

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The government of Bangladesh (GOB) is committed to ensuring equitable access to healthcare for its citizens, regardless of demographic and geographic location. Availability, retention, and continuation of quality health workers are impediments. <sup>6</sup> With reference to the Bangladesh Health Workforce Strategy-2015, determination of service level-wise health workforce needs, and demand of health workforce up to 2030 and beyond is an activity to carry out.

An assessment of the health workforce according to the need of the population of the country and/or available facilities both in the private and public sector should be done. The production of different categories of health workforce should be based on the need to balance an appropriate skill-mix in delivering health care services at all levels.

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