

Universal Health Coverage, Leave no child behind

Introduction

Following their high-level meeting on 23 September 2019, world leaders of the United Nations General Assembly made a Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage (UHC). UHC ensures all people, everywhere, can access the quality health services they need without facing financial hardship. “This declaration represents a landmark for global health and development,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General at WHO. “*The world has 11 years left to make good on its sustainable development goals. Universal health coverage is key to ensuring that happens.*”

The Declaration reaffirms:

- the right of every human, without distinction of any kind to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and
- the 2030 agenda on Sustainable Development Goals with a view to **leaving no one behind** and **reaching the furthest behind first**.

During October – November 2019 a survey was conducted among the European Paediatric Network (members of European Academy Paediatrics, European Paediatric Association and the European Confederation of Primary Care Paediatricians). Questions relate to several paragraphs of the Political Declaration addressing child health including disabled children.

‘What would be the least paediatricians can do to contribute to the UHC?’

Reaching the furthest behind first

- The importance of primary care

The most powerful aspect is the importance of primary care, as emphasized in the Declaration. From the first question regarding measures to reduce maternal, neonatal, infant, and child mortality and morbidity, the promotion of primary care arises as a key issue. A large number of respondents highlight the importance of supporting “primary paediatric care with an emphasis on care in rural and distant areas...” This is particularly applicable to *reaching the furthest behind first*.

- The disabled child

To “increase access to health services to all persons with disabilities...” a large proportion of the responders indicate; “paediatricians should take an active role in providing quality information on the cause of disabilities”. Suggestions to improve services:

- an effective integrated medical and social approach
- collaboration between health and social services at the primary care level
- better coordination of services

Leaving no one behind

- Diagnosis

Respondents agreed that accessible diagnostics, regardless of ability to pay, were essential, and offered suggestions to relieve costly genetic tests and patient diagnostic odyssey in rare disease:

- open source information to improve knowledge of medical care taker
- unification of diagnosis and treatment at the European level, increasing patient numbers to improve systems efficiency and cost-effectiveness

- Digital Health

Improved integration of digital health information would aid collaboration and enable services to be better coordinated; this was acknowledged in the survey, but not considered a top priority.

However, it was recognized that if we can improve these systems, it would help achieve the UHC goals. Furthermore, the aspect of electronic information is relevant, as paediatricians providing quality information on disability also find websites and online patient support groups helpful.

In summary, to increase global awareness, paediatricians doing nothing is not an option. A global paediatric network to support the sustainable development goals of the UHC seems the least paediatricians can do.

December 2019 Bryony Coupe and Liesbeth Siderius