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Message from the Director-General

In 2003, before I took up the position of Director-General, I asked many leaders and decision-makers in health what they saw as the most important issues in their countries. One common theme, whether in developed or developing countries, was the crisis in human resources.

There is a chronic shortage of well-trained health workers. The shortage is global, but most acutely felt in the countries that need them most. For a variety of reasons, such as the migration, illness or death of health workers, countries are unable to educate and sustain the health workforce that would improve people's chances of survival and their well-being.

People are a vital ingredient in the strengthening of health systems. But it takes a considerable investment of time and money to train health workers. That investment comes both from the individuals and from institutional subsidies or grants. Countries need their skilled workforce to stay so that their professional expertise can benefit the population. When health workers leave to work elsewhere, there is a loss of hope and a loss of years of investment.

The solution is not straightforward, and there is no consensus on how to proceed. Redressing the shortages in each individual country involves a chain of cooperation and shared intent between the public and private sector parties which fund and direct educational establishments; between those who plan and influence health service staffing; and between those able to make financial commitments to sustain or support the conditions of service of health workers.

This report aims to provide clarity through presentation of the evidence gathered, as a first step towards addressing and resolving this urgent crisis.



Dr LEE Jong-wook
Director-General
World Health Organization



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