The Millennium Development Goals (MDG): Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

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In September 2009, 189 heads of states adopted the UN Millennium Declaration and endorsed a framework for development. The plan was to countries and development partners to work together to reduce poverty and hunger, and to tackle ill health, lack of education, gender inequality, lack of access to clean water and environmental degradation. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established, with targets for 2015, and indicators for monitoring progress. The MDGs related directly to safeguard optimum health, to reduce child mortality by two-thirds (MDG4), to reduce maternal deaths by three-quarters and achieve universal access to reproductive health (MDG5), and to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and, tuberculosis, malaria and other major diseases (MDG 6). All other MDGs have an indirect influence on health. MDG goals, targets and indicators are interdependent measures of progress. They are not meant to limit priorities in health, nor define how programmes should be organized and limited.

Dr. Chok-wan CHAN, currently President of the International Pediatric Association (IPA) and Advisor to Child and Adolescent Health (WHO), has been instrumental for the policy, health financing, action plans, implementation and progress monitoring for IPA’s programme on the health-related MDGs to date. IPA is made up of 148 national, 7 regional, 16 subspecialty member societies together representing one million pediatricians in one joint voice for global child health.

IPA firmly believes in “child survival, child health and child development”. More than ten years ago, long before the Lancet Series for Newborn Survival was published, we already started our programmes on “Newborn Survival” and on “Child Watch Africa” alerting the world of major health problems in Sub-Sahara Africa with the famous Nairobi Declaration for Child Survival striving to arouse awareness and attention of the global world of appalling conditions where our children lived. This was accomplished with the outstanding achievements including the monumental Meeting between the Health Ministers of 28 African Countries and the management of IPA at the time of the World Health Assembly at Geneva in 2005. This marked the commencement of a series of activities launched by IPA.

Pediatricians at IPA are committed to promotion of breastfeeding and we are committed to the values of exclusive breastfeeding with zinc supplements, control of vaccine for preventable diseases as well as indoor and outdoor environmental health through our programmes on nutrition, immunization and environmental health. We also created programmes for Child Survival, MDG and Child Health at Humanitarian Emergencies. Our Council of Delegates, the highest governing body for IPA, passed resolution in Athens in 2007 to support these activities via our effective communication network (namely the IPA Newsletter, Website and the Journal for Global Child Health) at national, regional and subspecialty levels. We formulated strategic plans to link up our societies and encourage twining between members with successful cases exemplified by the Norway/Nigeria, American Academy of Pediatric (AAP)/India and AAP/Egypt partnerships, just to cite some good results. Our quality-care and evidence-based
practice, advocacy and ethics committees work synergistically to ensure high standard pre-service training, continuing medical education (CME) and continuous professional development (CPD) to guarantee best service delivery to our children so as to enhance procurement of their highest attainable potentials and health in life. We encourage our members to influence their ministries of health on health policies for children. All these amalgamate to support the new roles of pediatricians in the 21st Century (clinicians, child public health workers, educators, researchers, administrators, parliamentarians, policy makers, advocates and others)

At professional levels we formed good collaborations between the pediatricians, obstetricians and gynecologists, nurses and midwives via the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) with good results at global and national levels. The partnership is one of the best to achieve optimum outcomes for maternal and child health at national, regional and global levels.

At global level, pediatricians work closely with WHO, UNICEF, FIGO, World Bank, Foundations and other agencies/professionals at the international child health arena offering our expertise, experience and knowledge as well as epidemiological data and latest research information for child health. We effect our strength via initiatives including the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI), the Global Action Plan against Pneumonia (GAPP), the Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI), the Countdown to 2015 as well as the Health Partnership Plus (HP+) and as one of the Civil Societies in consultation for the High Level Taskforce on Innovative International Financing for Health Systems chaired by Mr. Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister of UK. The latest meeting was successfully convened in Johannesburg, South Africa on 13-14th May 2009. Pediatricians participated at this Meeting with good commendable contributions.

Based on his first hand knowledge and information on the MDGs, Dr. Chok-wan Chan will outline the progress, the current state of affairs and achievements to date. He will also analyze underlying factors and potential reasons for the success and failures in the past and endeavour to outline challenges and opportunity as well as their possible solutions for the remaining five years towards 2015.

He stresses the critical role of the national health policy and strategy in strengthening health systems and delivering effective interventions in an integrated approach to accelerate progress towards the health MDGs, with a special focus on the health of Women and Children.

Pediatricians globally are confident that, with joint dedicated effort, we will surely be able to provide strategic action plans for effectively implementing global initiatives in the attainment of the MDG’s by the year 2015 so as to render our world a better place for children to grow and develop. Our ultimate goal is to ensure achievement of the IPA motto “Healthy Children for a Healthy World”!