

Address

By

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Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia*

At

Inauguration of Public Health Lounge

Colombo, Sri Lanka

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**DR SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

President and the Council Members of the College of Community Physicians; the Secretary, Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, Government of Sri Lanka, members of the College, distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here at this important event and thank the organizers for the invitation.

I congratulate the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition of the Government of Sri Lanka and the College of Community Physicians for taking another significant step in the strengthening of public health in the country. This Public Health Lounge will help bring us a long way forward in promoting the development of more public health professionals in Sri Lanka.

Public health is not new, its principle and practice are dated back to more than a century. Today, we need to revisit public health, to re-examine its principle and practice. There are many reasons to do so.

There has indeed been a remarkable change in the concept of and approach to health development. Along with this change, there has been an evolution in the principle and practice of Public Health. Health issues have increasingly become public concerns and the subject of public debates; and health concerns have been

more and more reflected on the political agenda for development at all levels. More and more health development needs the combined force of multisectoral and multidisciplinary actions. Nowadays, we increasingly talk about using health to reduce poverty and to spearhead the thrust for peace.

Health development moves gradually towards primary prevention to reduce disease burden, the primary prevention that bases its interventions on health risks and health determinants. Today, we are not only concerned with survival, but also with a socially and economically productive life.

Changes in the world necessitate new measures and new interventions to ensure human well-being in all spheres, including in health. In health, we need public health with its new paradigm, new outlook. We need public health interventions that can effectively ensure equity and social justice in health. We need public health interventions that promote health as a fundamental right of everyone. Public health interventions that ensure reaching the unreached.

In this new public health paradigm, essential functions of public health, which are country-specific, need to be defined in the local socio-cultural, economic and political context.

Primary health care is an indispensable tool of public health towards the achievement of national health goals, including the Millennium Health Goals. PHC encompasses social and economic productivity of all citizens in all countries. This is the composite of today's health landscape, one which has many stakeholders and partners.

The goal of health has indeed become a social goal; and has transcended the traditional parameters of health. We need to revisit our “public health” in order to keep pace with the global changes today,

Certainly, there is a need to strengthen our public health infrastructure and public health workforce. More attention is needed for the public health workforce, especially those who are working at the community and grassroots level. These people are community-based workers and community volunteers. These people can effectively help ensure reaching the unreached, the poor, the under-privileged, the marginalized and the vulnerable.

We, public health professionals, should fully support these dedicated people in all aspects of their work. While at the same time we have to train and equip our public health professionals in order to move forward more effectively in the new public health paradigm, the paradigm that can help ensure good health for all through primary health care approach. The paradigm that brings out quality health services beyond the institutional boundary to the entire community and the whole population. These services are reaching out to all people everywhere, regardless physical and psychosocial barriers.

Strengthening public health infrastructure and the public health workforce is accorded highest priority in the WHO South-East Asia Region. We promote and support the development and strengthening of public health education institutions. The South-East Asia Public Health Education Institutions Network (SEAPHEIN) has been in existence for such promotion and support. The network convenes an annual meeting for promoting intercountry cooperation in public health education. This year

the meeting will be held in Bali, Indonesia, in June. All of us here are cordially invited to attend.

I also would like to take this opportunity to place on record our deep appreciation for the valuable support from Dr. Palitha Abeykoon, to the work of “Public Health Initiative” of SEA Region, and to the work of SEAPHEIN in particular. We hope for his continued contribution to this priority work of WHO in the Region. WHO’s former staff members in Sri Lanka are also valuable assets to help in this endeavour. Once again, I thank the organizers of the event for the invitation. I wish the Public Health Lounge all the best and all success in its operation. And I finally thank you all for your kind attention. Thank you.