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Improving Health Care Delivery on National Levels - Role of the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association and Your Partners in Healthcare

Dear Honoured Guests, President, Colleagues and Members of the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association,

First and foremost, thank you greatly for your gracious invitation to address the participants of the Annual Congress of the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association. Regrettably, I am not able to attend this event, which I have no doubt will be a successful and rewarding experience for all in attendance. Nevertheless, I would like to share with you my thoughts on the potential that the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association has for improving healthcare delivery in your country; potential that can be identified at events such as your annual Congress, and realized within your daily practice.

Focus on healthcare above your own interests

I would like to begin my message to you on what I feel is a very important point: although associations such as yours gather pharmacists and other professionals, their key focus should always be on improving health, rather than on defending the interests of health professionals. By constantly upholding this noble cause, recognition of the role of the pharmacist in the healthcare system will continue to grow, and in that way all will see a greater respect for the profession as a whole. This will extend to the community level and be seen in the patients you treat and to the government level where, as we have seen in other countries, Ministers of Health will start to take notice and stress upon the important role you can play.

Leadership and Vision

Pharmacists should always be aware of current and future challenges they are facing. In that regard, pharmaceutical associations have the responsibility of raising awareness of national and international developments within pharmacy practice and science. They have a duty to prepare their Members for new challenges and to provide them with ways of meeting new expectations. This does not just mean with practical tools and skills, but also motivating and encouraging all to become involved in ensuring positive outcomes.

Ensuring the highest ethical standards

It is in the interest of all pharmacists to have comprehensive ethical rules which govern their profession. Such rules will improve the quality of services offered by pharmacists, are a strong commitment to the community and to the government and enables pharmacists to be seen as trustworthy healthcare providers.

To encourage the development of such rules and guidelines, FIP has developed a statement on the Code of Ethics for pharmacists. Many pharmacists' organisations have already adopted such rules. These rules can either be part of the law (especially when registration at the association is compulsory to work as a pharmacist) or be part of the membership policy of the organisation, stating that if a pharmacist doesn't respect these rules, he can no longer be a member of the organization.

Improving quality of current services

It is imperative that we as pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists are constantly improving those services which are unique to our field. As such, FIP offers its Member Organisations many useful tools to accomplish this goal. Examples are statements on policy and guidelines such as Good Pharmacy Practices or Modules on HIV, available on the FIP websites.

Many pharmaceutical associations worldwide have developed their own standards using the FIP materials and FIP Regional Pharmaceutical Forum materials as clear and effective guides.

Through continuing education and or activities aimed at improving practice (conferences, workshops, articles in professional journals, self-assessment tools, as well as guidelines), an organisation such as the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association can truly implement major improvements in healthcare delivery.

In addition to these guidelines, FIP encourages further action taken by pharmaceutical associations, such as developing tools aimed facilitating the work of pharmacists, such as:

- the development of software enabling a good dispensing processes through the access of relevant information on the patient and on his past treatment,
- stamps to provide a counseling leaflet to illiterate patients (like the FIP Military and Emergency Pharmacy Section project on pictograms),
- medicines information tools such as compendiums and/or database containing major information on the approved medicines in the country.
- These tools can also be a support the role of pharmacist in health promotion (such as communication campaigns with patient leaflet and/or posters) for instance.

The source of innovation

Through international activities and being part of the Global network of Pharmacy through the FIP, your organisation is able to provide your government with concrete examples of pharmacists' activities in improving healthcare delivery systems of a country. Through concrete and evidence-based examples, governments are listen, and often *changing*, in response to positive outcomes brought forth by associations such as yours.

Partnering to governments

If not properly evaluated and implemented, the greatest ideas can sometimes have dreadful consequences on the field. Being a responsible organisation means analyzing new government policies and to providing feedbacks on their feasibility. This feasibility should consider the following aspects: sufficient workforce for this new policy; proper economical revenue for this work; integration of this service into everyday pharmacy practice; acceptance from patients; sufficient knowledge and skills of pharmacists to provide such a service and location specific challenges.

Implementing new policies

To enable pharmacists to take new responsibilities and assume new roles, it is essential to provide them with an effective continuing education framework. Such a commitment from pharmacists' associations can either be through the direct provision of lectures and publications, or by ensuring that continuing education providers (whether they are public or private) offer high-quality programmes through an accreditation system.

This role is crucial in maintaining the capability of pharmacists to practice and/or to provide new services agreed with the government, which will improve health care delivery system.

Linking education with local needs

Pharmacists' organizations, because of their expertise in local pharmacy practice and needs, should be key partners in developing policy on pharmacists' education. Many countries' associations have pro-active roles in ensuring the education provided to both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians is in accordance with local needs.

In some countries, like in Ireland or in Denmark, pharmacy technicians' education is supplied by the pharmaceutical association, facilitating an education in relation to local needs.

Such an involvement of pharmacists' organization can even go up to the accreditation of schools of pharmacy (like in the United Kingdom).

In order to expand our own influence, gain more knowledge and in turn provide member organisations with some useful tools, FIP has formed partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Education, Sciences and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), under a tri-partite agreement.

Such a partnership aims to focus on three major fields in terms of pharmacy education:

- Academic Workforce,
- Quality Assurance
- Vision and Competency.

Its goals are to establish frameworks, tools and guidance which would be useful on a global level to facilitate education development.

Maintaining quality

Some organisations have developed their own accreditation and qualification system for pharmacists and pharmaceutical outlets, based on compliance to the standards developed by the profession. In some cases these incentives are part of the re-registration system and therefore compulsory to maintain practice.

Similarly some member organisations may, in accordance to their own rules, cancel a membership of a pharmacist because of his unethical practices or behavior.

Updating regulation

As a highly regulated activity, the pharmacy sector must comply to many standards. It is one of the duties of pharmaceutical associations to provide its members with updates on the current regulation and legislation, especially when new legal requirements are introduced.

Of course, all these services and activities cannot be implemented at the same time. But through FIP and its other member organisations, you have access to expertise in all of these fields. Such expertise will enable you to better start these activities. I know that Ethiopian pharmacists are willing to improve the healthcare delivery system in your country and I have no doubt that, united, you will be able to strengthen your position within the health system in Ethiopia, always with a focus on patients' needs.

I will you and your organization the best for this exciting challenge.