



Emerging health issues and the way forward

Muhammad Akram Malik^a, Nida Noor^b

^aProfessor, Department of Urology, University Medical and Dental College, The University of Faisalabad, Faisalabad.

^bJournal Coordination, Journal Section, University Medical and Dental College, The University of Faisalabad.

Correspondence: *nidanoor812@gmail.com

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Health systems are facing a multitude of challenges today, and many of these issues do not exist in isolation. The burden of non-communicable diseases is growing, the threat of infectious disease continues, mental health gets more attention, and the health consequences from climate change are already manifesting. These challenges can in many countries come together to compound the problems at hand. Solutions are built on collaborative clinical care, research, and evidence-based public policy interventions rather than individual decisions^[1].

Non-communicable diseases are the major cause of death. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease are the four disease groups that lead to early death in LMICs. Rapid urbanization, lack of exercise, dietary changes, use of tobacco, and air pollution also add to the burden of NCDs. Many healthcare facilities are fighting both communicable and chronic diseases. Prevention of these diseases at an early age is a must. Emphasis on early detection, lifestyle modifications, and community health education can reduce the burden of NCDs in the coming years^[2].

Infectious diseases also pose a great threat. Old infections are coming back, and new infections are emerging. Our detection and response mechanisms for infectious disease outbreaks have failed. Antimicrobial resistance is also on the rise, meaning there are fewer effective treatments available. These can lead to extended hospital stays, increased healthcare costs, and preventable deaths. Improvements in infection control, prevention, and treatment are the essential needs of healthcare facilities^[3].

Mental health is being recognized, but there are large areas where mental health facilities are yet to be established. Depression, anxiety, and substance use are the major contributors to disability^[4].

The barriers to the access of mental health care services persist because of stigma, lack of training among the staff and poorly developed policy frameworks, especially in low-income countries. Integrating mental health services with primary health care services may help in the improvement of the accessibility and continuity of care. Initiatives towards

the improvement of health knowledge and the development of community programs may also help in the elimination of the gaps in care^[5].

Clearly, climate change is affecting people's health. Many people are experiencing heat-related diseases, changes in insect-borne diseases, food shortages, and displacement. Most of the vulnerable are experiencing the worst of the effects. Environmental issues also impact the health of the mother and the child. There is a need for health workers, environmental experts, and other relevant bodies to collaborate and protect the health of the unborn because all of these^[6].

Meanwhile, technological advancements are also affecting the delivery of healthcare. Digital health and telemedicine, for one, have become effective ways of increasing access to healthcare, especially in areas with limited access. These technologies can improve the delivery of healthcare, especially during health emergencies^[7].

Health security is not just about trends in disease; it's also about how our systems are designed and financed. Cuts in public health spending may undermine our systems for detecting and responding to disease outbreaks and may exacerbate inequities in resource-scarce settings. Global collaboration in ongoing work, robust research partnerships, and sustained funding are all necessary to prepare us for future crises^[8].

The current challenges in healthcare underscore the need to ensure that policies are based on preventive care, integration, and equitable access to healthcare. It is necessary to strengthen primary care systems, public health understanding, and research and innovation capabilities. Academic journals play a significant role in disseminating information and facilitating policy decisions that serve the best interests of public health.

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