



Resolution of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for South-East Asia: Introducing Health Humanities to Health Professional Education and Training

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INTRODUCTION

The Seventy-eighth Session of the World Health Organization (WHO) South-East Asia Regional Committee was held from 13 to 15 October 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The meeting brought together health ministers, senior officials, WHO leadership and partner organizations to review regional health progress, adopt resolutions, and set priorities for the coming years.¹ The meeting marked a key moment in advancing a holistic, people-centered health system. By adopting a resolution to integrate health humanities into health professional education, training, and service delivery, Member States reaffirm the enduring relevance of the WHO definition of health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Recognizing both the scientific and humanistic dimensions of health care and responding to documented gaps in empathy and compassion among health professionals, this resolution emphasizes the imperative of people-centered and ethically grounded practice. This editorial highlights the Resolution's timely commitment to strengthening humanistic competencies within the health system in the region. It urges continued research, cross-country exchanges of best practices, and integration of innovative health humanities approaches into curricula and service delivery to advance compassionate and equitable care as an essential component of universal health.

KEY CONCERNS AND PROPOSITIONS OF THE RESOLUTION

Report of the Seventy-seventh Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India, 7–9 October 2024 had highlighted the role of health humanities in improving people-centered care, as aligned to the WHO Global Code of Practice.² Growing concerns over documented gaps in empathy among health professionals has catalyzed this regional action. Studies show that a curriculum prioritizing medical humanities increase cultural competencies³ and empathy scales of the students.⁴ Such course helps to develop new approach to medical education.⁵ Furthermore, health humanities expand the scope of medical humanities to collectively enhance human well-being.⁶

The resolution acknowledges that health care education and practice involves both science and art. The artistic aspects such as listening, helping, showing compassion and respecting others have often been overlooked but they are becoming increasingly important as rapid technological process transforms

the global health system. The Regional Committee concerned especially with gaps in empathy and compassion amongst health professionals in the Region as documented in research, reported in media, and as regularly raised by senior academicians and policy-makers at national, regional and international forums.

It has emphasized both the imperative and opportunity to advance a more humanistic and people-centered health system where health workers are not only technically skilled but ethically grounded, culturally responsive, and deeply humanistic, with simultaneous contribution to the well-being of students, health professionals, and the population at large.

The resolution appreciates the leadership of the academics and practitioners from the region in highlighting the importance of health humanities to strengthening people-centeredness of health care in the WHO South-East Asia; in documenting the range of initiatives (including use of cinema, fine art, music, literature, narrative writing, theatre and cadaver as teacher) within the Region to advance this effort; and for gathering together significant capacities available within our Region through strengthening the Global Network of Health Humanities.

The Resolution Urges Member States to:

- Integrate health humanities in health professional education and training, and in health service delivery, as appropriate to the country context;
- Encourage innovations and conduct research on the role of health humanities in health professional education and training, and in health care;
- Engage in regional and international fora to exchange lessons and positive experiences on producing more compassionate, culturally sensitive, and ethical health professionals as well as on building a more humanistic, people-centered health system, including the introduction of health humanities in health professional education and training; and

The Resolution Requests the Regional Director to:

- Collect and synthesize evidence, and facilitate cross-country exchange, on innovative models, positive

practices, and outcomes related to strengthening humanistic and people-centered health systems, including through introduction of health humanities in health professional education and training;

- Engage with other international organizations in promoting a global initiative to strengthen health humanities to health professional education and training; and
- Report progress on implementation of this resolution to the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia every two years beginning from 2027.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NEPAL

As a Member State of WHO South-East Asia Region, Nepal should play a proactive role in implementing the resolution. The country can begin by integrating health humanities into health professional education and training, as well as into health service delivery, in ways that are appropriate to its socio-cultural context. The Medical Education Commission of Nepal has central responsibility to coordinate universities and academies and to develop a mandatory, competency-based curriculum on health humanities across medical, nursing, public health, pharmacy and allied health programs. Professional regulatory bodies including the Nepal Medical Council, Nepal Nursing

Council, Nepal Health Professional Council and Nepal Pharmacy Council should incorporate health humanities standards into accreditation, licensing, and continuing professional development requirements to ensure sustained implementation in both education and practice.

Nepal should also encourage innovation and research on the role of health humanities in improving empathy, communication, ethical practice, and people-centered care. Academic institutions and professional organizations should engage in regional and international forums to exchange lessons and good practices in developing compassionate and culturally sensitive health professionals. In alignment with the resolution, Nepal can support efforts of the WHO Regional Director to collect and synthesize evidence, promote cross-country collaboration, and engage international partners in advancing a global initiative on health humanities. Regular national reporting and monitoring, synchronized with progress under resolution will be essential to ensure accountability and sustained progress toward a more humanistic and people-centered health system. In this context, the WHO Nepal Country Office can play an important role by convening stakeholders for discussion and help co-designing the health humanities course. It can also support the process by training human resources, monitoring implementation activities, and reporting progress to the WHO Regional Office.

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