

UHC Forum 2017

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Yoshitake Yokokura, MD

President, World Medical Association

On behalf of the World Medical Association, WMA, I would like to say a few words as we start the UHC Forum 2017.

I understand that this forum aims at contributing to the global activities to realize the UHC by reviewing the progress of each country to achieve the goal and discussing the necessary procedures to accelerate it focusing the successful cases.

In the modern era where borderlessness rapidly progresses with the advance of globalization, the cross-border unity of physicians worldwide has been increasingly important in preparation for the spread of infectious diseases and the occurrence of natural disasters. This requires the efforts to build a new system toward the new era. This is also evident from the fact that strengthening the international crisis management system and the international health framework became a major theme at the G7 Ise Shima Summit and the G7 Kobe Health Ministers Meeting which Japan chaired last year.

In a chaotic world, global issues including “Health care in danger” developed by the International Committee for the Red Cross, “Climate change” which has various influences on environment and health such as global warming and air pollution, and “Social determinants of health (SDH)” which addresses social factors for ill health are some of the themes which require urgent measures.

To cope with these problems in global health, the WMA which consists of 114 member NMAs has been engaged in the activities working closely together with the WHO in a wide range of fields of medicine mainly to build a medical system and strengthen the public health framework in these years.

Concerning the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), the WMA has announced that it will cooperate with international organizations including the United Nations and WHO to achieve the Universal Health Coverage, one of the targets of the SDGs.

The WMA is concerned about the economic prevalence of rapidly expanding NCDs and their effects on health, social and economic areas, recognizing the importance of measures to be taken beyond the fields and departments at the regional, national and global levels. It is necessary, based on practice of the SDGs and approach of the SDHs, to strengthen the health care system to accelerate the efforts to prevent and manage NCDs. It will also continue to cooperate with the WHO in accordance with its action program which announces the above plan as one of the most critical issues.

I feel that the medical community in the world has entered the era which faces such difficult challenges that require the physicians of NMAs to be more closely united striving for stronger collaboration.

Under these situations where we face so many serious issues, I was inaugurated as the 68th President of the WMA in Chicago in October this year.

In my inauguration address, I highlighted the fact that there was a "Universal health insurance" as the UHC in the basis of our health system which pushed Japan's life expectancy to the world top level. Japan has successfully achieved rapid development after the war, and it was because we created a "Universal health insurance" system which supports all the nation by being "able to work with peace of mind". We will continue to contribute to well-being of the people all over the world by spreading the idea of this excellent health system to the world.

Turning to the present and future, the medical profession at the transition period should return to the basis of health care, create a healthy longevity society, and continue to support it. We are confident that the "UHC" is also a key to creating models to guide aging societies, unprecedented in the world, towards a "sense of security".

I think that it is ideal that because of extended healthy life expectancy the elderly people can create a basis of the nation where they work as "the people who support a society" rather than "those who are supported by the society". In this sense, the significance of promoting the UHC is extremely high to realize such a society.

Here, I would like to talk about my vision of what healthcare should be. This was mentioned in a lecture by the late Japanese economist Hirofumi Uzawa when he was teaching at the University of Chicago's Department of Economics in the 1960s. He referred to social systems for enabling all people to lead abundant lives and maintaining an attractive society as "Social Common Capital".

He positioned healthcare as one of these systems, alongside the natural environment, roads, water supply, electricity, and education.

Professor Uzawa described the conditions as follows.

The institutional, social, and financial conditions necessary for all people comprising the society to receive the very best healthcare that the society can provide at that time—regardless of their age or gender, and regardless of their economic or social circumstances—must be in place.”

Once these conditions are in place, rules are necessary to ensure that they are maintained. Although these rules may be harsh for use physicians, they may have even greater fulfillment and honor.

Professor Uzawa continued as follows.

In both education and healthcare, professional specialists carry out their professional duties in accordance with professional standards and discipline, in the hope that all people in society will

become happy and prosperous.” Surely this expresses the core of healthcare or the ideal form that healthcare should take. It is also exactly what is obtained by the achievement of the UHC.

As President of the WMA, I will collaborate with the other international organizations such as the WHO, hoping that health care will be "social common capital of the whole world" under the way the UHC should be.

I sincerely hope that active discussions at this forum will produce more efficient and substantial measures and greatly contribute to the construction of the UHC to improve the health level of people around the world.

Thank you very much.