WHO Director-General supports Indian healthcare reform proposal

Special Correspondent

The World Health Organization is fully committed to helping countries achieve universal health coverage, and the broad strategy for UHC in India outlined by the High Level Expert Group of the Planning Commission can be successful, the Director-General of the WHO, Margaret Chan has said.

In a communication to Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, Dr. Chan commended the Indian government’s emphasis on replacing inefficient and inequitable private financing, notably user fees, with much higher levels of public financing. The World Health Report 2010 had demonstrated that this was a vital component of successful UHC strategies.

“I have the honour to congratulate you on the recent news that the Indian Government is about to double public health spending and initiate major systems reforms, in order to achieve universal health coverage,” Dr. Chan said. This was a “truly historic time” for the people of India, after the country’s recent achievement of no longer being a polio endemic country, she added.

The WHO had been supporting the work of the HLEG which produced the UHC strategy. Given the experiences of other countries that had achieved UHC, Dr. Chan said she was convinced that the broad strategy outlined in the report would be successful, and that within the period of the Twelfth Plan, hundreds of millions of people in the country would benefit from access to better health care.

The WHO Director-General described the proposal to distribute essential drugs free through public health facilities as an “effective way to deliver a quick-win” in health sector reforms. Launching the UHC with such an initiative also made perfect sense, given India’s leading role in supplying quality generic medicines globally.

The initiative to provide good health services to the largest number of people without health coverage in the world would have a major impact on improved health in India, Dr. Chan said, promising the WHO's firm commitment to help achieve the UHC goals.

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