

DIGITAL SKILLS

Group names: Klara, Cathrine, Bright, Ritha, Shegun, Medard

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Lecturer: Amitave Bamik

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The use of Digital Communication, Collaboration, and Participation

The Strength of Primary Health care Nationally

- Strengthening primary health care: a national imperative Across the world, the pursuit of more equitable, comprehensive and integrated models of health care was first inspired by the Declaration of Alma-Ata in 1978, which encouraged a focus on primary health care towards “the progressive improvement of comprehensive health care for everyone, and giving priority to those most in need” (1). Forty years later, countries are coming together to reaffirm their aspiration and collective imperative to strengthen primary health care as they reinterpret the goals of Alma-Ata in a contemporary context (2). This brief highlights the opportunities created by digital technologies in achieving the vision for primary health care.
Digital technologies: a force for change Information and communication technologies were newly emerging when the Declaration of Alma-Ata was agreed four decades ago. At the time, the adoption of these technologies in health services was complex, costly and limited.

Changing Force in Digital Technology

- The commonplace technologies of today such as smart phones, tablets and laptop computers did not exist. However, by 1990 new technologies – notably, the Internet – had begun to have a revolutionary impact. As they became more advanced (3), more assimilated in all sectors and mainstream in society these technologies have shown remarkable value for health. From technologies that allow people to manage their health more effectively, to better ways of diagnosing disease, to monitoring the impact of policies on population health, digital technologies for health, or digital health, are having a profound effect on how health services are delivered and how health systems are run. The impressive trend in national policies for digital health¹ (more than 120 countries by 2015) (4) reflects the firm commitment to use digital technologies to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, support universal health coverage and shape the future of primary health care.

Conclusion

Digital technologies have already opened up a wealth of possibilities for shaping the future of primary health care and ensuring effective public health action. They have catalysed a host of changes in education, policy and practice as well as created new patterns of communication, empowerment and engagement. A recommitment by governments to the goals of primary health care and its values of inclusiveness and equity promises more changes to come, with digital technologies central to the vision and its realization

Rederences

- 1. Primary health care: report of the International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6–12 September 1978/jointly sponsored by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. Geneva: World Health Organization; 1978. (http://www.who.int/publications/almaata_declaration_en.pdf, accessed 17 September 2018).
- 2. Global Conference on Primary Health Care. Towards Health for All. Media centre. World Health Organization (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2018/global-conference-phc/en/>, accessed 17 September 2018).
- 3. Greatest engineering achievements of the 20th century. The National Academy of Engineering. (<http://www.greatachievements.org/?id=3824>, accessed 17 September 2018).
- 4. Global Observatory for eHealth. Directory of eHealth policies. World Health Organization. (<http://www.who.int/goe/policies/en/>, accessed 17 September 2018).