



The Crisis of Covid-19: The Best Opportunity for Paying Attention to the Principle of Inter-Sectoral Coordination in the Health System

Mehdi Zanganeh Baygi¹, Mostafa Peyvand^{*2}

¹Assistant professor in Health Care Management, Health Promotion Research Center, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran

²MSc of Epidemiology, Student Research Center, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran

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***Correspondence to:**

Mostafa Peyvand,
MSc, Epidemiology, Student
Research Center, Zahedan
University of Medical Sciences,
Zahedan, Iran
Tel: +98 9159412965
Email: mp.peyvand@yahoo.com

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Dear Editor

A week after a meeting of the health ministers from countries around the world in 1978 in the city of Alma-Ata, the former Soviet Union and present-day Kazakhstan, a declaration was adopted that lighted up the future of all countries in the field of health, the declaration that is still helpful and practical after more than four decades of its codification (1).

In this document, Primary Health Care, or PHC, was announced as a means of achieving the great goal of Health for All (HFA). It comprises four principles and 11 components. The components of PHC are the service package that was supposed to be provided in all countries for free, equal, and to all (2). However, the more important point is the announcement of four essential principles as a platform to offer these services and countries should take measures for the delivery of these services by creating such a context.

Justice, community participation, appropriate technology, and inter-sectoral coordination were the four most critical principles referred to in the Alma Ata Declaration as a necessary condition to facilitate the provision of primary health care to the people. The concept of justice, as inferred from the slogan of the declaration, "Health for All," is regarded as one of

the most basic policies in health services, for health is a phenomenon that is considered beyond the formal and contractual boundaries, and gender, place of residence and nationality are not a barrier to make a difference in it (3).

The main requirement for the delivery of all services is the acceptance and participation of the community as recipients of services because the highest quality services will be useless without the approval of the people. The application of different tools and technologies is also essential in the health system, so that health care is often possible using various tools.

The fourth principle in the Alma-Ata Declaration is cross-sectoral coordination, which has remained essential and progressive after more than four decades (4). It is evident that health services are a set of different and diverse measures that are not limited to the health care system. Perhaps the ultimate goal of many of the services delivered in other sectors of development also leads to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of the community. Accordingly, the principle of inter-sectoral coordination is an essential and critical policy in the health system and PHC with the assumption that all the existing capacities in all governmental and non-governmental organizations

must be exploited at all times, so that maximum efficiency from a set of various actions is achieved (5).

The crisis of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in recent months has highlighted the importance of this policy more than ever before (6). Possibly, the benefit and integration of the tasks of other organizations in the field of combating the coronavirus have been very fundamental and beneficial, ranging from the armed forces, police, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the Basij troops to the capacity of clergymen, Friday prayer leaders, and congregation prayer leaders to the actions of other administrative areas such as municipalities, education, and the Red Crescent. More importantly, NGOs, health volunteers, and charities play a significant role in managing this crisis (7).

A committee called the Health Council was formed in all cities and provinces at the national level to strengthen this principle from the beginning of the establishment of the health care network system in the country in the 60s (which was done with the aim of implementing PHC in the country (8). In recent years, it has been operating in the form of a working group on health and food security, and its main task has been to pay attention to the principle of inter-sectoral coordination to promote the health of the people and society (9).

In the crisis of Corona, this committee works in the form of a national campaign to combat Corona virus at the national, provincial, and local levels. It is responsible for all decisions associated with the prevention and control of the disease with the explanation of the status quo. Some approvals of the committee are very vital and far-fetched, and it has been able to manage the disease effectively. Closing all schools and universities in the early days of the crisis in the country and also closing all the mosques and religious places a few days later were among the most critical decisions of this committee. Taking into account the cultural and religious conditions and details and different interests and traditions among the people in the decision-making of the Coronavirus control center has been very crucial (10).

All these measures emphasize the progressive principle of inter-sectoral coordination between different agencies and organizations to provide, maintain, and improve the health of the community. Although such measures are very complicated and challenging, it appears that we still should take advantage of this opportunity in the best possible way with the experiences achieved in the crisis of Covid-19, so that they can be influential in the path of health promotion of the community, as it was before.

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