

Policy Brief

CONTEMPORARY MEDICINE, HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES, VACCINES FOR EMERGING PUBLIC HEALTH RISK |

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**Health Services Academy
Islamabad**

Introduction:

Health Services Academy is a pioneering public health institution that is engaged in teaching, research, trainings and policy advice to the Government. HSA is mandated by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MNSR&C) for these tasks and conducts/ hosts international public health conferences to highlight issues of importance in public health and generate knowledge through experience sharing of different stakeholders working in the similar and allied fields. Based on these discussions, moderations and experience sharing, HSA compiles recommendations for the MNHSR&C in the form of a policy brief report.

In the wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic, an international public health conference took place at Health Services Academy to discuss the issues relating to contemporary medicines, medical technologies and vaccines. The issues of equitable access to medicines, health technologies and vaccinations have become far more important than before as they have posed serious threats for the overall health system delivery processes, leaving the health systems unable to cope with emerging health risks. In a developing country like Pakistan, many different types of treatment options are practiced, including homeopathy, ayurvedic, unani medicine and allopathy. People in general believe in the effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicines. Due to the wide usage of these treatment options, there is a need to develop a policy to integrate the traditional and alternative medicine (TAM) into the contemporary health system of Pakistan. Besides policy formulation, accessibility and affordability of TAM are other major concerns that need policy attention.

As the world is geared to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, the rising Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is posing a serious threat, especially when there is not even a single SDG indicator which is specific to AMR. If AMR is left unchecked, the world will certainly fall short of attaining the SDGs, as the modern medicine and SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), among others – depend on ensuring that life-saving drugs continue working. International community has started giving attention to the issue and Fleming Fund- UK, for example, has started developing a thorough plan on AMR involving the human health, animal health and other related stakeholders under One Health in Pakistan. Standard global communication tools should be used to facilitate practices and policies aimed at reducing antimicrobials in the country.

Another aspect for discussion in the conference was indoor health facilities. Sehat Sahulat Program (SSP) that started in 2015 at the federal and provincial levels, provides free of cost indoor health care services to the poorest segment of the population. Stakeholders that discussed these issues, explored the ways to prioritize public health and detailed the way forward included MoNHSRC, UNICEF, National Institute of Health (NIH), GIZ, Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU), PMAS, Aga Khan University (AKU), Fleming Fund, World Health Organization (WHO), University Of Manitoba (UOM), DKT, IPAS and PANAHA. The recommendations of the conference (that spread over two days of rigorous deliberations) resulted in the following specific action points / implications for health policy:

Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination

- To address existing health problems in the wake of the current pandemic, MoNHSR&C should develop a concrete plan that integrates segments of the problem, not forgetting the already high neonatal mortality rates in the country. A national framework needs to be developed that identifies ways to increase investment and make available enough resources for health, The system should encourage increased participation of the females in health system strengthening.
- MoNHSR&C should focus on strengthening health facility management and quality of care practices.
- The Ministry should consider increased recruitment of neonatal specialists and nurses.
- Try develop a mechanism through which the services of homeopathic physicians and hakeems could be integrated in the existing public hospitals. The Government may consider increasing the number of seats on Basic Pay Scale (BPS) for Homeopathic and Tib practitioners
- Traditional medicine should be integrated into national health care and primary health care, and relevant strategic standards should be identified and evaluated
- MoNHSR&C should make increased investments to bring improvements in health infrastructure and encourage variety of food production.
- MoNHSR&C should adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address sensitive nutrition issues e.g. wasting, stunting, and vitamin D deficiency in both mothers and children
- Integration of policies and guidelines like food waste management in nutrition programs and Universal Health Care (UHC) packages, nutrition education for dietary risk factors, logistics, recording, and addressing supply chain issues.
- Analysis and strengthening of relevant regulatory systems for food safety national authorities.
- MoNHSR&C should ensure adequate utilization of routine RMNCAH health services while adopting precautions for COVID-19. This may result in saving lives that are being lost due to underutilization of services during pandemic.
- MoNHSR&C should work with both federal and provincial governments to steer policy processes and start developing a National Action Plan for Trans-Fatty Acids (TFA) elimination.

Ministry of Education

- Education Ministry should consider starting short courses on Homeopathic, herbal medicines and biotechnology related subjects at the school, college and university levels.

Sehat Sahulat Program:

- SSP should consider including primary health care and outpatient services in Sehat Sahulat Program.

World Health Organization

- To initiate and promote traditional medicine in the country, WHO should consider establishing and supporting a “Traditional Medicine Foundation”.
- WHO should help formulate and implement traditional medical policies and regulations.
- Current practices during COVID-19 have revealed increased reliance on alternative treatment options across countries. WHO should consider endorsing traditional medicine for treatment of COVID-19 as the clinical results from China revealed effective treatment for COVID-19 through traditional medicines.

Healthcare Facilities:

- There is need for gender-inclusive healthcare facilities in the country to address vulnerabilities of females in the country.
- Health professionals should help in detecting the healthcare problems. This can be done through better access to data and sharing for pharmaco-vigilance.

Livestock Industry

- To enhance inter-sector collaboration for health improvements in the country, increased biosecurity and infection control mechanisms need to be developed at the farm level.
- Antimicrobial usage and compliance needs to be better understood at food production level.

RMNCH Programs

- To ensure quality, improvement activities should adopt WHO standard tools for quality enhancement in RMNCH. Due importance should be given to effective legislation for notification and compilation of the relevant data regarding MNCH to find, explore and trace the actual ground realities and the way forward to manage them.