

The first mile: setting the framework for effective community health systems

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The famous physicist, Nils Bohr, often employed a truism when he tried to take the students with him behind the scientific curtain of the quantum theory. This truism went something like this : "The universe is only complete for those who see it in a complete light. It remains fragmented for those who see it in a fragmented light". The parallel between this truism and my mini-comments on today's theme is that health has to be seen not only internally as an integrated whole, but also externally as an integral component of overall social and economic development. If this holistic attitude does not prevail, then both the deciding politician as well as the consuming citizen will regard the health care system kaleidoscopically with all its consequences as regards lack of social relevance and social productivity. It is actually this lack of holism in the planning, structuring, organization and evaluation of the health care system which is at the root of today's confidence crisis surrounding the health care system in so many countries, developing as well as developed. This confidence crisis has in such countries resulted in a rapidly increasing criticism of the paradox of increasing costs and decreasing satisfaction. It is most regrettable that this confidence crisis has been nourished through a considerable social defeatism on the part of the medical profession when it comes to giving promotive health care that primordial role it should play in tomorrow's socially integrated welfare system.

When looking ahead, one might either attempt to predict what probably will happen tomorrow, or one might focus on what ought to happen. I believe that the latter approach is the more challenging, that is, to attempt to predict and control future events on the bases of a continuous analysis of today's positive and negative results. And for that analysis I warmly recommend you to read and re-read the WHO / UNICEF Alma-Ata Report on Primary Health Care from 1978.