

The health workforce: central to an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe

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Background:

COVID-19 has reinforced the centrality of health workers at the core of a well performing and resilient health system. It has

concomitantly exposed the risks of staffing and skills shortages and the importance of protecting the health workforce. This paper focuses on highlighting some of the lessons learnt, challenges and future needs of the health workforce in Europe in the context of COVID-19.

Methods:

We use secondary sources and expert information.

Results:

During the pandemic innovative and flexible approaches were implemented to meet increasing demand for health workers and new skills and responsibilities were adopted over a short period of time. We have seen the rapid adaptation and use of new technologies to deliver care. The pandemic has underlined the importance of valuing, protecting and caring for our health workforce and the need to invest appropriately and adequately in the health workforce to have sufficient, capable and well-motivated health workers. Some of the main challenges that lie ahead of us include the imperative for better investment, to need to improve recruitment and retraining whilst better retaining health workers, a focus on domestic sustainability, redeploying and developing new skills and competences among health workers, enabling more effective multi-professional collaboration and team work, improving the quality of education and training, increasing the public health focus and promoting ethical and sustainable international recruitment of health workers.

Conclusions:

The WHO European Region through its European Programme of Work 2020-2025 is fully committed to support countries in their efforts to continue to respond to COVID-19 and whilst addressing upcoming health workforce challenges.