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# Continuing the Education of Health Workers

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A WORKSHOP MANUAL

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F.R. ABBATT • A. MEJÍA

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
GENEVA

# CONTINUING THE EDUCATION OF HEALTH WORKERS

## A WORKSHOP MANUAL

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The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations with primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. Through this organization, which was created in 1948, the health professions of some 165 countries exchange their knowledge and experience with the aim of making possible the attainment by all citizens of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life.

By means of direct technical cooperation with its Member States, and by stimulating such cooperation among them, WHO promotes the development of comprehensive health services, the prevention and control of diseases, the improvement of environmental conditions, the development of health manpower, the coordination and development of biomedical and health services research, and the planning and implementation of health programmes.

These broad fields of endeavour encompass a wide variety of activities, such as developing systems of primary health care that reach the whole population of Member countries; promoting the health of mothers and children; combating malnutrition; controlling malaria and other communicable diseases, including tuberculosis and leprosy; having achieved the eradication of smallpox, promoting mass immunization against a number of other preventable diseases; improving mental health; providing safe water supplies; and training health personnel of all categories.

Progress towards better health throughout the world also demands international cooperation in such matters as establishing international standards for biological substances, pesticides, and pharmaceuticals; formulating environmental health criteria; recommending international nonproprietary names for drugs; administering the International Health Regulations; revising the International Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death; and collecting and disseminating health statistical information.

Further information on many aspects of WHO's work is presented in the Organization's publications.

# FOREWORD

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The World Health Organization has for many years been concerned with methods of maintaining and improving the competence and performance of all categories of health worker. This concern was formalized in a resolution of the Twenty-seventh World Health Assembly in 1974, which called on Member States to consider as a matter of urgency:

1. The development of national systems of continuing education for the health professions, based on national and local health needs and demands, integrated with health care and educational systems, with full utilization of the resources of universities and schools of health personnel;
2. The promotion of the systems approach in educational planning for continuing education and the periodic assessment of the quality of performance of health personnel in delivering preventive and curative health care.

Continuing education becomes of paramount importance during periods of accelerated change, such as the one through which Member countries are now passing in their efforts to reorient their health systems to primary health care as the key means of achieving health for all under increasingly difficult socioeconomic conditions.

In a system of continuing education there is a network of inter-related elements embracing the people, policies, plans, functions, and facilities of several institutions and programmes, which have agreed to work together to provide an opportunity for all health workers to continue progressive learning throughout their careers. The system should facilitate community participation and ensure the coordination and deployment of resources from various sectors and programmes, the ultimate aim being to improve the competence of all categories of health worker.

Continuing education should respond primarily to the needs of the health system which, in turn, should respond to the needs of the people. It should also answer the needs of health workers striving to maintain and improve their professional competence.

The management of health services is made much more effective if all categories of health personnel undergo continuing education and if the supervision of health workers becomes part of the educational process. Appropriate continuing education should provide a bridge between basic training and practice; when integrated with supervision it helps to raise the standards of health care and leads to more efficient work patterns. Important as it is, however, continuing education does not have a life of its own and it is not an end in itself. It

requires sustained effort to make human work more relevant to the achievement of health programme goals.

This learning package is based on a set of guiding principles for the development of a system of continuing education for health workers that were originally issued in provisional form in 1982, and subsequently tested for their practical relevance to national needs and resources. It represents a further step in WHO's efforts to co-operate with Member countries in the development of systems to coordinate the activities of health services and educational and research institutions, professional associations, and other relevant entities. Coordination of this kind in turn facilitates inter-agency participation in establishing continuing education as part of national strategies for health development. Continuing education accessible to all categories of health staff calls for a comprehensive, intersectoral, and multidisciplinary approach.

As well as for those engaged in basic and post-basic training, this book is intended for decision-makers at all levels of the health care delivery system who are involved or interested in organizing continuing education for health workers. The methods it describes are flexible enough to be adapted to each country's political, socioeconomic, and health situation. I sincerely hope that Member States will find it suitable and useful.

*T. Fülöp*

Director,  
Division of Health Manpower Development,  
World Health Organization.

# PREFACE

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The overall purpose of this book is to promote the development of systems of continuing education and describe some of the principles involved in establishing them, at either a national or regional level. The development of systems of continuing education should not be seen as an end in itself: rather the aim is to improve the quality of health care provided by the whole range of health workers. Thus the development of appropriate systems of continuing education for health workers should be seen as one of the key strategies to be adopted to attain the goal of health for all by the year 2000.

Within this very broad context, one approach to stimulate the establishment of systems of continuing education is to conduct a workshop attended by policy-makers and people with influence in the health care system. This would increase awareness of the importance of continuing education and start the process of forming plans for a continuing education system.

This book provides resources for a five-day workshop. Participants in this workshop would review the existing provision of continuing education in their countries or areas, identify ways in which this provision could be improved, prepare policy documents, outline programmes, and agree on a specific plan of action that would lead to the development of an improved system of continuing education. Thus the workshop would be concerned not just with providing knowledge or skills but with providing a meeting place at which participants can reach practical decisions that can be implemented without delay.

## **How to use this book**

This book is designed for three different groups of people, who will tend to use it in different ways.

The first group comprises the people who organize workshops on continuing education. Part II provides these workshop teams with a feasible timetable together with a detailed commentary on the way in which the sessions should be conducted, the key points that should be covered, and the difficulties and problems that may arise. This general commentary is supported by specific exercises that can be used during the workshop. Part III gives more detailed practical information on planning, conducting and following up a workshop.

The guidance given is sufficiently detailed to enable the workshop team to run a successful workshop, but it is not intended to impose a rigid programme or to imply that the methods it describes are the only ones suitable. On the contrary, the workshop team should adapt the contents of this book to the local situation.

It is also recognized that the principal quality required of a workshop team is the ability to stimulate learning and group problem-solving rather than to inculcate a high degree of expertise in the development of systems of continuing education. The latter may be acquired by studying Part I of the book.

The second group of readers is that comprising the participants in the workshop. It is anticipated that Parts I and II of this book will be used during the workshop as a guide to the various discussions and activities and as a source of general principles on the continuing education of health workers. Ideally, it should also inspire participants to record their own ideas, conclusions, and decisions on how a system of continuing education can be implemented in their own specific situations. In other words, participants can transform the general ideas printed in this book into specific proposals for action.

The third group that might use this book is made up of individual readers who are interested in promoting continuing education systems. It is suggested that these people first read the Introduction and then work through the workshop timetable and exercises in Part II, actually doing each of the exercises and consulting the appropriate chapters in Part I. Used in this way rather than being read from cover to cover, the book may stimulate the thinking of individual readers, leading them to develop solutions that are more appropriate to the local situation than could ever be provided in a conventional textbook.

A final point, which applies to all the people who might use this book, is that only a selection of reference materials has been provided so that some issues are not covered in great depth. In particular, the educational sciences related to continuing education are not really considered, so readers interested in planning educational activities within a system of continuing education may find relevant information in the following books.

Abbatt, F. R. *Teaching for better learning—a guide for teachers of primary health care staff*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1980.

Guilbert, J.-J. *Educational handbook for health personnel*, 6th ed., Geneva, World Health Organization, 1987 (WHO Offset Publication No. 35).

Hall, T. L. & Mejia, A. *Health manpower planning: principles, methods, issues*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1978.

Hornby, P. et al. *Guidelines for health manpower planning*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1980.

Katz, F. M. & Fülöp, T., ed. *Personnel for health care: case studies of education programmes*, Vol. 1. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1978 (Public Health Papers, No. 70).

Katz, F. M. & Fülöp, T., ed. *Personnel for health care: case studies of education programmes*. Vol. 2. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1980 (Public Health Paper No. 71).

Readers who are more interested in the management of the system and its relationship to health manpower development in general will find the following books useful.

*Global strategy for health for all by the year 2000*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1981 ("Health for All" Series, No. 3).

*Development of indicators for monitoring progress towards health for all by the year 2000.* Geneva, World Health Organization, 1981 ("Health for All" Series, No. 4).

*Managerial process for national health development: guiding principles for use in support of strategies for health for all by the year 2000.* Geneva, World Health Organization, 1981 ("Health for All" Series, No. 5).

*Health programme evaluation: guiding principles for its application in the managerial process for national health development.* Geneva, World Health Organization, 1981 ("Health for All" Series, No. 6).

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# INTRODUCTION

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## **Continuing education and the need for a system**

There is increasing recognition of the need for health workers to continue their education throughout their careers. Not only do health workers themselves wish to improve their own skills and competence but the introduction of new techniques and equipment and the changes taking place in health needs and health care policies necessitate continued training. The phrase "health care" is intended to mean not just curative treatment for the sick but the whole range of provision for promoting health and preventing disease.

In virtually every situation some response to this need has been made, so continuing education does take place—even though it may in many instances be ineffective or insufficient. Continuing education may be initiated by the health workers themselves, by their supervisors, by the managers of the health system, or by other agencies such as professional associations, publishers, and drug companies. The form of the continuing education may be written materials (journals, books, advertisements), meetings, courses, supervisory visits, or a variety of other methods.

With this diversity of approach it is not surprising that the effectiveness of the continuing education should be variable. So it is natural that in many countries there is concern that more continuing education should be provided and that it should be more effective.

The approach suggested in this book for achieving this aim is to develop a "system" of continuing education. This term needs some explanation as it is capable of being interpreted in many ways. A system is not the same thing as an organization that provides continuing education. It is much more than that. It is the sum of the educational activities, the organizational structure that supports and manages those activities, and, crucially, the relationship between the educational activities, the management, and the external agencies involved in the provision of health care (e.g., the Ministry of Health). The system should comprise a nationwide coordinated programme in which technology and resources are optimally used.

It is impossible to describe a system that is appropriate for every situation, though it is possible to define some criteria for judging a system. Since there is no ideal model to adopt, each country and each region within a country should design its own system by taking into account the way in which health care is organized, the local cultural and economic situation, the demand for continuing education, and the constraints and resources available. The notes on workshop organization given in Part II do *not* specify what kind

of system is needed. Rather such workshops are designed to help the participants think through their own needs and opportunities and so develop a system that will be appropriate to their situation. These issues are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

### **Stages in the development of a system**

Health workers often have an opportunity to continue their education, but this educational provision is fragmented and uncoordinated and needs to be developed into a more effective system.

Probably the most common first stage in the development of a system of continuing education is the recognition that the existing opportunities for continuing education are inadequate. In other words, the first stage is the identification of a problem, and this is dealt with in Chapters 1-3.

The problem may be recognized either by the health workers themselves (individually or through some form of association or union) or by the managers of the health care system. In principle, the problem might be recognized by the community, though in practice this is unusual.

Following the recognition of the problem, the next stage is a commitment or a decision to try to solve the problem. It is at this stage, that the workshop described in this manual becomes useful. Unless there is some prior awareness that the current provision of continuing education is unsatisfactory, there is little point in meeting to discuss how that provision could be improved. It is not perhaps necessary for every participant at the workshop to be aware that the problem exists, but it would be premature to organize a workshop unless a good proportion of the participants feel that some improvement in continuing education is important.

The workshop can therefore be useful in identifying individuals who are already committed in principle to the idea of providing continuing education for health workers. It can also help in persuading other individuals, especially those in positions of power, that continuing education is a crucial way of improving the quality and relevance of health care and thus a powerful management tool for the implementation of strategies to achieve health for all by the year 2000.

The next stage is planning or programming and is described in Chapters 4-6. The workshop provides a setting where this stage can be started. The extent to which planning can be completed will vary from one workshop to another and depend on the people who attend, but it is to be hoped that in every workshop some provisional plans will be prepared for implementing a system of continuing education.

The final stages, implementing the plan and evaluating the system of continuing education, are covered in Chapters 7-9. These stages can, of course, occur only after the completion of the workshop.

## **The role of a workshop in developing a system**

The development stages outlined in the previous section do not apply in every situation, but are sufficiently common to be worth considering. The essential point is that a need must be recognized. What often happens is that a few individuals recognize this need but do not have sufficient influence to bring about the necessary changes. This is one common situation in which a workshop can be of value. If the participants include a number of people who recognize the need for a continuing education system and a number of decision-makers who do not yet recognize the need, the workshop can bring about a shared awareness.

A workshop can also serve as a forum for identifying specific solutions to the problems that have been identified. By bringing together people with different responsibilities and backgrounds, various approaches can be considered in an informal, yet structured, situation. The approaches can be discussed, modified or adapted until some measure of agreement is reached on a feasible and appropriate approach within the specific situation of the country or area where the workshop is held. Thus the workshop can serve as the starting-point for actions that will lead to the development of a national or area-wide system of continuing education.

A workshop is unlikely to be the setting for actual decision-making, and it cannot implement the system. But it can serve as a forum for the sharing of ideas among the key decision-makers, it can help to bring about a consensus on the need for systems of continuing education, and it can promote agreement among the participants about the activities that should follow the workshop in order to implement an effective system. Indeed, unless the workshop does lead to specific actions in the development of a system of continuing education, it will have failed.

### *The general nature of a workshop*

The word 'workshop' is used very widely to mean an educational event lasting for a period of between half a day and two or three weeks. Usually the word implies a certain style of education that minimizes formal lecturing and presentations of information while emphasizing active learning by the participants, but other characteristics are also important in workshops on continuing education systems.

The most important is that the aim is not to teach participants new facts or skills. Nor is it to persuade them to accept proposals or solutions presented by the workshop team. The intention is very firmly to provide a setting in which the participants themselves will reach decisions, make plans, and initiate change. It is vital that the decisions and plans should be those that the participants formulate themselves.

Since so much stress is laid on the participants' identifying solutions to their own problems, one might argue that there is no need for a workshop and that it would be better to allow the decision-making and problem-solving to take place through the ordinary routine processes. However, this is not so, because the workshop does have four clear benefits.

1. The attention of the whole group of participants is focused on the issue of continuing education for an extended period of time. Thus the experience and expertise of a number of people from differing backgrounds will be available in one place over a period of several days. This would be unlikely to happen under any other circumstances.
2. The activities of the workshop are structured to guide the problem-solving process. This is done by asking particular questions or by setting certain tasks. It is also done by suggesting techniques for problem-solving such as brainstorming and syndicate groups, with which some of the participants might otherwise not be familiar.
3. Resource materials will be available for participants to consult during and after the workshop.
4. The workshop is designed to lead to action through the preparation of a 'Plan of Action' during the final day and through the type of evaluation suggested.

These benefits do not, of course, guarantee that either appropriate decisions will be made or that any decisions will be implemented. However, the design of the workshop is intended to maximize the probability of both these outcomes.

### *Objectives of a workshop*

The overall purpose of this book—and by implication of a workshop based on it—is to support the development and implementation of a national or local system of continuing education. This is done by providing a setting where the participants of the workshop can reach decisions and formulate plans that will be implemented later.

To support this broad purpose, the objectives of the workshop are to enable the participants to:

1. Describe the provisions made for continuing education (including supervision) in their countries or areas and make comments concerning its quality in comparison to the criteria outlined in Chapter 2.
2. Identify the kind of continuing education required in their own countries or areas in terms of the people who need continuing education and the skills they need to learn.

3. Prepare a document describing the policy for continuing education in their countries or areas.
4. Prepare a programme for a continuing education project.
5. Prepare a plan for the evaluation of the continuing education system as a whole.
6. Prepare a plan of action for maintaining progress towards the establishment of a system of continuing education.

This list of objectives should not be regarded as comprehensive. It gives only the key objectives that will enable the group to initiate work in continuing education.