



IFMSA

International Federation of
Medical Students' Associations

IFMSA's contribution to the *Health Workers on the Frontline* panel at the HRC Social Forum 2017

Question: *You are a member of the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, a network of 1,2 million medical students that issued this year a Declaration of Commitment to Eliminate Discrimination in Healthcare Settings. How did mobilise your members to adopt this groundbreaking declaration? How would you ensure that it makes a difference for the next generation of medical professionals?*

Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

It is an honour for me to talk as the voice of worldwide medical students today. We, as IFMSA, are certainly aware of the strong link between the protection of human rights and the access and utilisation of health services. We experience this in two ways: Where human rights are violated in the first place, such as lack of access to education, the vulnerability to acquire communicable diseases increases severely. And unfortunately, we know that when a person lives with a such a disease it often leads to unnecessary and harming restrictions of their human rights. It affects them in even more aspects of their lives than simply the denial of the right to health, but also the right to privacy or the right to liberty and security just to name a few.

Hence, for us as medical students, it's a priority concern to break in on this vicious circle and take a stand for the affected populations. Although we see many starting points to intervene, we recently have been focussing on one aspect that interacts with many facets of human rights protection, and this is the right to non-discrimination in health care.

We as future health care professionals form the core of health systems all over the world and therefore have the power to eliminate discrimination in clinical settings from the inside out. It includes respecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality, non-judgemental consultation, aiming for informed consent and providing the best standards of comprehensive healthcare regardless of the patient's background.

So, we as IFMSA put a strong focus on capacitating our members to provide non-stigmatising healthcare to all people, everywhere and anytime. At the same time, we want to function as key stakeholders and safeguards of human rights – reaching beyond the boundaries of health systems as informed advocates and activists.

One major step to work towards these aims was the adoption of the Declaration of Commitment to Eliminate Discrimination in Healthcare earlier this year. The declaration builds on the Zero Discrimination Agenda of UNAIDS and forms the base on which we have been initiating several actions that I would like to give you an insight in.

A crucial act for mobilising our members to commit to this declaration was the adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding with the youth-led organisations Y+ (Global Network of Young People Living with HIV), YVC (Youth Voices Count) and JYAN (Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network) during our last General Assembly in August. It confirms and emphasises our common goal of increasing both awareness and knowledge of medical students on the importance to fight discrimination. This Memorandum of Understanding means a lot to us as it enables our federation



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to work more closely with key populations representatives who our activities are addressed to. Any actions that derive from here will be taken in close collaboration with our partner organisations to make sure they actually cater to the needs of the target groups and common vision that we agreed on.

One of the key deliverables of the MoU is the elaboration of an advocacy brief. We envision it as a resource that can be used by the members of all four organisations who want to actively advocate for non-stigmatising healthcare. It should contain relevant and evidence-based information for understanding the urgent need to tackle discrimination in healthcare with special regard to young people. The creation of such a resource will give us a valuable tool to put our actions in effect not only on an international, but also on national or regional level.

A second project that derives directly from the MoU is the elaboration of a guidance note to build more inclusive medical curricula. We are convinced that the earlier future health care workers are sensitized and educated on the impact of discrimination in their work field, the more they will be able to practice non-stigmatising medicine from the beginning. Unfortunately, medical curricula often lack to address rights-based medicine or discriminatory issues at all. Sometimes they even contribute to stigmatising medical practice, e.g. by teaching unnecessary precaution when treating PLHIV, by promoting a narrow medical approach that does not take into account the patient's individual background or by reinforcing stereotypes in case studies and study literature. By building the guidance note with representatives of key populations, we want to ensure as much as possible the reflection of the specific needs of those who struggle the most with discrimination in healthcare.

We are glad that we have already initiated these two projects in the frame of a collaborative session at our General Assembly. In this session we conferred with medical students from all regions of the world and two representatives of Y+ about the preliminary outline of both the advocacy brief and the guidance note for medical curricula and gathered their input on the possible content.

Now that the base for our actions is set, we will focus on the development of the drafts with the continuous involvement of our national and local members and the consultation of key populations. This is to ensure that our outcomes actually serve the future medical professionals and enable them to make an on-site difference in health care provision.