

## **Foreword**



Effective principles and practice of public health are central to the health and well-being of people and communities. Public health activities encompass all organized efforts of society to develop public health policies, promote health, prevent disease, and foster social equity within a framework of sustainable development. Public health's mission is to fulfill society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy.

The closing decades of the second millennium have witnessed spectacular achievements in health development in the countries of the South-East Asia region. Smallpox and guineaworm have been eradicated, polio and leprosy are on the verge of elimination. Much progress has been made in increasing life-expectancy, decreasing infant and child mortality, and reducing disease burden, but much remains to be done.

Rapid advances in health sciences, the changing epidemiological and demographic profiles, the consequences of globalization and market mechanisms present new opportunities as well as formidable challenges for public health. The Regional Conference on Public Health in the 21st Century was organized by WHO at Calcutta from 22 to 24 November, 1999 to identify the priority areas and chalk out plans for action.

The Calcutta Declaration on Public Health adopted at the end of this Conference embodies the consensus of the delegates, and details the thrust areas for future action. This Special Issue which carries presentations made by eminent speakers at the Conference will be of immense use as a reference document for the public health planners, trainers and practitioners in facing up to the challenges ahead.

All developing countries will find useful direction in the Declaration for action aimed at strengthening, adapting and reforming their public health systems to ensure universal access to good quality, affordable and sustainable public health services based on scientific evidence.

The future brings with it a vision of public health that is filled with challenges and opportunities, when public health would find its rightful place at the core of the development agenda. We should make effective use of public health's unique tools of health promotion, disease prevention, and population-based approaches for innovative strategies addressing critical areas and contemporary public health challenges. The various agencies should actively collaborate in the process of developing public health - in the areas of education, research and public health interventions. They should work together to meet common threats to public health, and to promote universal well-being.

The dilemma is that the environment for matching the technology to the need will differ from that in the past. Public health professionals will have to gear themselves to meet this major challenge, and convert it into an opportunity. They should take steps for appropriately implementing the principles, actions and responsibilities through coordinated action, full participation and partnership. With a combination of vision, commitment, successful leadership, effective organization and concerted action, I am confident that the developing nations of the world will achieve notable public health successes in the 21st Century.

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