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16TH ECSACONM BIENNIAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

REPORT



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Overview

The 16th Biennial Scientific Conference of the East, Central, and Southern Africa College of Nursing and Midwifery (ECSACONM) took place from September 11 to 13, 2024, at the Avani Maseru Hotel in Maseru, Lesotho. Under the theme *"The Role of Evidence-Based Practice and Innovations in Nursing and Midwifery in Combating Emerging and Re-Emerging Pandemics,"* the conference convened over 500 delegates from 18 countries, including policymakers, researchers, educators, nurses, and midwives. This significant gathering aimed to address critical healthcare challenges, particularly in light of global health crises and pandemic preparedness.



The conference highlighted the critical role of evidence-based practices (EBP) in advancing healthcare and achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). It also explored innovative solutions, such as the use of technology in healthcare, and emphasized the importance of strengthening midwifery practices. Participants engaged in plenary sessions, breakout discussions, oral and poster presentations, and cultural showcases, all contributing to actionable strategies and resolutions to improve healthcare systems across the region.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of the 16th Biennial Scientific ECSACONM Conference was a grand and well-orchestrated event, bringing together esteemed guests and healthcare leaders to reflect on the conference theme, *"The Africa We Want."* PS Ntene, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Health in Lesotho, officially welcomed the delegates, emphasizing the remarkable progress



of nursing over the past 200 years. While celebrating these achievements, he stressed the need for continuous innovation and collaboration to address evolving healthcare challenges. His remarks highlighted the importance of building a resilient and adaptive healthcare system, serving as both a tribute to the past and a call to action for the future. Lesotho's Minister of Health, Mr. Selibe Mochoboroane, urged participants to transition from discussion to implementation, emphasizing the need for patient-centered services and preparedness for emerging health crises. Acting Prime Minister Hon. Nthomeng Majara recognized the vital contributions of nurses and midwives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and stressed the importance of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures to safeguard healthcare systems.



Guest of Honour Hon. Nthomeng Majara

Key speakers reinforced the importance of evidence-based practices (EBP), technology, and partnerships in advancing nursing and midwifery. Mr. Sibusizo Sibandze, Acting Director General of ECSA-HC, called for leveraging technology to address uncertainties from emerging medical conditions and encouraged knowledge sharing among participants. Jhpiego's representative emphasized the pivotal role of nurses and midwives in achieving universal Primary Health Care (PHC), while Dr. Glory Msibi, President of ECSACON College, described EBP as the cornerstone of healthcare policy development, public health initiatives, and maternal and infant mortality reduction. He further advocated for sustainable, long-term partnerships to create cost-effective healthcare solutions. The WHO representative commended the resilience of nurses and midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed the urgent need for workforce training programs aligned with future healthcare demands.



The ceremony concluded with symbolic and unifying moments that celebrated the profession's legacy and regional unity. The Lighting of the Lamp honored Florence Nightingale's enduring contributions, symbolizing compassion and commitment in nursing. Delegates and dignitaries gathered for a group photo, followed by the national anthems of Lesotho and the African Union. A recorded address by Dr. Pamela Cipriano, President of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), highlighted the importance of EBP in pandemic preparedness and global health security. She called on participants to adopt EBP-informed policies to enhance resilience and ensure the region is better equipped to tackle future challenges

Plenary Sessions and Discussions

The plenary sessions at the 16th Biennial Scientific Conference of ECSACONM were strategically structured over three days, each focusing on distinct themes critical to healthcare transformation. On **Day 1**, discussions centered on Human Resources for Health (HRH), with panelists emphasizing the ECSA-HC collegiate training model as a crucial mechanism for improving access to and the quality of healthcare workers. The session highlighted HRH as strategic capital, stressing the importance of investments in professional development, retention strategies, and better remuneration to ensure a motivated and skilled workforce capable of driving effective health systems.



On **Day 2**, the spotlight was on innovation and collective learning. An interactive session, *Fail Fest: Beyond What Works*, facilitated by Knowledge SUCCESS, introduced Appreciative



Inquiry (AI) as a tool for collaborative reflection and problem-solving in healthcare delivery. Participants explored challenges, successes, and lessons learned, leveraging strengths-based approaches to promote innovation and improved practices. This session underscored the potential of AI to foster a culture of resilience and continuous learning within healthcare systems.



The final day, **Day 3**, focused on Universal Health Coverage (UHC), highlighting the pivotal contributions of nurses and midwives to achieving UHC by 2030. Discussions emphasized their role in enhancing service delivery, ensuring quality care, and expanding healthcare accessibility, especially in underserved regions. Panelists called for strengthened collaboration between governments, healthcare institutions, and training organizations to bridge gaps in care provision and empower frontline healthcare workers, whose efforts are indispensable for the realization of UHC.

Breakout Sessions and Presentations

The theme of the conference, *"The Role of Evidence-Based Practice and Innovations in Nursing and Midwifery in Combating Emerging and Re-emerging Pandemics,"* was explored through various sub-themes, including advancing innovation and technology, research and implementation effectiveness, policy-making and leadership, and midwifery's impact on maternal and infant health. These themes were central to the discussions and presentations over the three-day event.



Oral Presentations

A total of 143 oral presentations were delivered, offering ground-breaking research and strategies to address global health challenges. Presentations focused on the role of nursing and midwifery in combating pandemics, emphasizing how evidence-based practices can enhance healthcare resilience. Many presentations provided actionable insights into improving healthcare systems to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Key themes included advancing technology, innovative practices, and leadership in nursing and midwifery to address emerging and re-emerging health crises.



Participants in an oral presentation

Poster Presentations

The 18 poster presentations showcased innovative solutions to pressing healthcare issues, with a strong focus on resilience in the face of emerging health crises. These displays highlighted advancements in healthcare delivery, from supply chain management innovations to community-based interventions, aligning with the conference's emphasis on evidence-based practices and their implementation.

Partners Sessions

The plenary sessions brought together key partners, including Amref Health Africa, Jhpiego, Intuitive Foundation, Empower School of Health, Axis Solutions Africa, and SolidarMed, to engage in collaborative discussions aimed at improving healthcare systems across the region.



Jhpiego led a session on "The Landscape for Nursing and Midwifery," focusing on an African perspective, gender integration, and balancing the scales to empower gender equity in nursing and midwifery education and workforce. Amref Health Africa emphasized the importance of soft skills in their session titled "Soft Skills: The Secret to Service Excellence in Nursing and Midwifery," highlighting how empowering nurses and midwives with essential soft skills can enhance care delivery.



Breakout Session (Jhpiego)

Intuitive Foundation's session on "Advancing Innovation and Technology in Nursing and Midwifery" underscored the significance of embracing innovative technologies to enhance patient care, improve outcomes, and streamline processes. Empower School of Health focused on strengthening frontline health workers' supply chain capacity in the Sub-Saharan region, equipping nurses and midwives with essential supply chain management knowledge. SolidarMed explored the impact of clinical simulation in advancing clinical education for nurses and midwives, enhancing their skills and preparedness for real-world challenges. Lastly, Axis Solutions Africa discussed "Reinventing Healthcare by Leveraging Innovation," aiming to enhance accessibility and affordability of healthcare through innovative solutions.

These sessions collectively highlighted the importance of collaboration among key healthcare partners to address various challenges in the healthcare system. By focusing on gender equity, soft skills, technological innovation, supply chain management, clinical simulation, and accessibility, the plenary sessions aimed to empower healthcare professionals and improve patient care across the region.



Exhibitions

The exhibition hall featured state-of-the-art technologies and tools designed to improve healthcare delivery and strengthen healthcare systems. Delegates were introduced to cutting-edge innovations that demonstrated practical approaches to tackling challenges in nursing and midwifery. These exhibitions provided the nursing and midwifery communities with new insights, empowering them to adopt innovative solutions for better healthcare outcomes.



Exhibition (Intuitive Foundation)

Together, the oral presentations, poster sessions, and exhibitions underscored the conference's commitment to advancing nursing and midwifery through evidence-based practices, technology, and innovation, while addressing critical global health priorities.

Cultural and Social Highlights

The conference included a vibrant gala dinner that celebrated the rich cultural diversity of participating countries. Delegates performed traditional dances and shared national songs, fostering unity and camaraderie. The dinner also showcased Basotho cuisine, giving attendees a taste of Lesotho's culinary heritage.



Gala Dinner Celebrations

In addition to the cultural displays, an awards ceremony recognized outstanding contributions to nursing, midwifery, and healthcare innovation. These accolades inspired participants to continue their efforts toward improving health outcomes in their respective regions.

Recommendations and Way Forward

1. **Education:** Accelerate the integration of evidence-based practices into training programs and expand the use of digital learning platforms to enhance accessibility. Embrace the collegiate model of training adopted by ECSA for nursing and midwifery, strengthen clinical supervision, mentorship, and preceptorship for students and junior nurses, and advocate for the incorporation of e-learning and simulation in education. Encourage nurses to pursue training in leadership, management, and governance.
2. **Technology:** Invest in telehealth and AI-driven tools to improve diagnostics and patient care in rural areas. Promote the use of telehealth and digital tools to enhance patient care, train healthcare professionals to use technology efficiently, and collaborate with biomedical professionals to develop new devices and equipment for training and improving health outcomes.
3. **Workforce Development:** Strengthen mentorship programs, address workforce shortages, and provide robust mental health support for healthcare professionals. Focus on training high-quality professionals to ensure competent and confident nurses and midwives, create a pool of specialties to address emerging health issues, and encourage active roles for nurses and midwives in leadership and politics.



4. **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for increased healthcare budgets and the development of policies that prioritize equitable access to healthcare. Strengthen professional engagements through QUAD in all member states, advocate for policies supporting evidence-based practice integration, align health budgets with the Abuja Declaration, and strategically engage policymakers to ensure nursing and midwifery perspectives are considered.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish frameworks to monitor the implementation of resolutions and ensure continuous improvement through data-driven insights. Use feedback from frontline workers and partners in care to improve practices and protocols while understanding and utilizing data for action.
6. **Strengthening Research Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between academic institutions, healthcare facilities, and research organizations to promote collaborative research. Establish grants and funding opportunities specifically for research focused on evidence-based practice, enhance research skills among nurses and midwives, and sensitize them on open platforms for sharing information as presented by AMREF.
7. **Continuing Professional Development:** Implement ongoing training programs that focus on the latest evidence and innovations in nursing and midwifery. Sensitize nurses and midwives to participate in online courses related to evidence-based practice, and develop a framework that fully supports blended learning platforms.
8. **Re-engineering Primary Healthcare and Universal Health Coverage:** Strengthen community engagement to implement primary healthcare elements and achieve universal health coverage, contributing to progress on sustainable development goals. Develop a position paper on increasing budgetary allocations to strive toward health for all.
9. **Implementation of Guidelines:** Develop and promote the implementation of guidelines that hasten the translation of research findings into practice, ensuring a seamless integration of evidence-based innovations in healthcare.
10. **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Encourage a multidisciplinary approach to healthcare by integrating insights from various fields such as social work and anthropology to enhance patient outcomes. Promote partnerships and teamwork among healthcare professionals to share knowledge and best practices.
11. **Human Resource for Health:** Develop sessional papers and legal frameworks to guide the migration of nurses and midwives. Focus on wellness and mental health support to



prevent burnout and promote resilience among healthcare workers. Build partnerships for resource mobilization and align efforts to improve health systems while addressing workforce shortages effectively.

Closing Remarks

The conference concluded with closing remarks by Mrs. Mpoetsi Makau, Director of Nursing Services in Lesotho, who emphasized the importance of implementing the lessons learned. She urged participants to apply the evidence-based strategies and resolutions in their local contexts to achieve tangible improvements in healthcare delivery. Dr. Glory Msibi, President of ECSACONM, reinforced the call for regional collaboration and innovation to address emerging health challenges effectively.