

Member States and Non-State Actors Gather for Annual WHO Conference to Address Digital Health

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Health professionals, policymakers, and experts from around the world convened yesterday, 5th April 2024, for the opening day of the annual three-day simulation World Health Organisation (WHO) conference. Hosted at Imperial College London, this year's conference topic is "Digital Health: Improving Health Through Digital Health Solutions", with 4 sub-themes.

Spanning three days, the conference promises to be an innovative and interactive way of learning more about global health diplomacy, and provide young people a platform to contribute to tackling key global health issues.

The LonWHO 2024 conference commenced on Friday afternoon with opening messages from Asrafizra Kunjang, Conference Director of LonWHO Simulation 2024, and Prof. Alain Labrique, Director (Department of Digital Health and Innovation at the World Health Organisation (WHO)), and keynote address by Dr. Anders Nordström, the former acting Director-General of the World Health Organisation.

This was followed by an insightful Panel Discussion on Digital Health Technology Adoption, where delegates heard from Assistant Professor Susanne Gaube, Head of Real World Evidence at Boehringer Ingelheim, Adrian Rabe, and Director and Research Assistant Professor at the National Telehealth Center of the University of the Philippines, Raymond Francis Sarmiento.

Last but not least, at the Global Health Fair and Networking Event, delegates engaged with presentations from Susan Thomas, the Clinical Director at GoogleHealth, as well as Daniel Oztzy Garcia, the executive director at the Central American Health Informatics Network (RECAINSA). In particular, the delegate representing Google posed some noteworthy questions to the Clinical Director at GoogleHealth.

The first day came to a close with one inspiring talk after another.

Throughout the second day, participants engaged in a series of committee sessions covering a range of sub-themes; Digital Health Financing, Digital Health Governance, Future of Digital Health: Artificial Intelligence, and Digital Health Divide.

Delegates highlighted the importance of prioritising digital literacy across populations, investing in public health infrastructure, and addressing accessibility of digital healthcare to achieve sustainable health outcomes for all.

In addition to the debate within committee sessions, delegates also heard from Non-State Actors (NSAs), who gave an insight into their companies and their goals. Presentations were given by Health AI, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Google, MSD, PATH, Pfizer, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Microsoft. These NSAs are able to approve up to two draft resolutions.

A memorable quote from the PATH representative during their presentation reads, "We don't just want to deliver food, we want to deliver the kitchen." Providing not only what is needed, but also the resources to be able to remain self-sufficient.

In Committee A, much progress was made, with multiple alliances formed, as follows.

Having spoken with USA, Guatemala, Canada, and Lebanon during unmoderated caucus in the second committee session, we establish that they strive for standardisation of healthcare practices. They aim to achieve this by collaborating with as many countries as possible, so that as many concerns as possible can be addressed. Their primary focus is standardising a shared language, enhancing interconnectivity - especially in terms of global equity, a data privacy plan, and standard software and technology for all countries. However, this can also be considered as being too broad of an approach, with a need for further consideration of different cultures. At the time of writing, they were also discussing potential NSA partners.

Countries such as Thailand, Taiwan, Switzerland, Malaysia, Singapore are working on implementing a percentage scale to reflect how certain AI predictions are in search results, whilst also considering the need to retrain AI as the user demographics change. This is backed by NSAs Google, Pfizer, and PATH (with the latter focusing on implementation in low- and middle-income countries).

On the other hand, Nigeria, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa are proposing 'Edutainment' as one way to achieve health promotion within communities, enabling solutions for health needs to be specific to the community. This can be done through incorporating informational and educational elements into entertainment media to promote wellbeing in countries with limited access to healthcare.

The first day of the Model WHO Conference set the stage for productive and inspiring discussions on pressing health issues facing communities worldwide. The second day had delegates engaging in insightful conversations and forming alliances, in order to address issues through collaboration. With participants united in their commitment to driving positive change, the conference promises to generate concrete solutions and catalyze action to improve health outcomes for all, in the field of digital health. The conference provides a platform for substantive discussions, networking and knowledge-sharing among attendees. Participants exchanged insights and best practices, forged new partnerships, and explored innovative approaches to addressing complex health challenges.

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