

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED HEALTH CARE INFORMATION TO

...feel empowered, build professional self-worth, learn, diagnose, educate the public and patients, and to save lives.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

What do we mean by health care information?

Health care information, in this context, is defined as the clinical reference and learning materials critical for the delivery of safe, appropriate and effective health care.

Health professionals need health care information to adequately diagnose and treat, to provide appropriate people-centred health care and patient education, and to feel empowered to save and improve lives.

Access to health care information should be considered as equally important as access to medicines and equipment. All are essential tools in the delivery of safe, efficient and effective health care and/or advice.

Health professionals also have a responsibility to pass on health and medicine information to their patients and the public in order to educate and empower individuals to effectively self-manage and achieve optimal health outcomes.

How does health care information affect motivation?

Lack of tools to deliver health care – whether drugs, equipment or information – disempowers health professionals and severely reduces their sense of professional worth, pride and job satisfaction.

Health professionals are key if we are to meet the national targets defined for Universal Health Coverage by 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, and in building resilient and people-centred health services to ensure global health security, fight antimicrobial resistance and other health related targets.

However, the World Health Organization estimates a shortage of 18 million health workers by 2030 because the poor quality of healthcare work environments are undermining health service delivery and driving them away.



STAND UP FOR
POSITIVE PRACTICE
ENVIRONMENTS

UNINFORMED HEALTH CARE IS UNSAFE HEALTH CARE

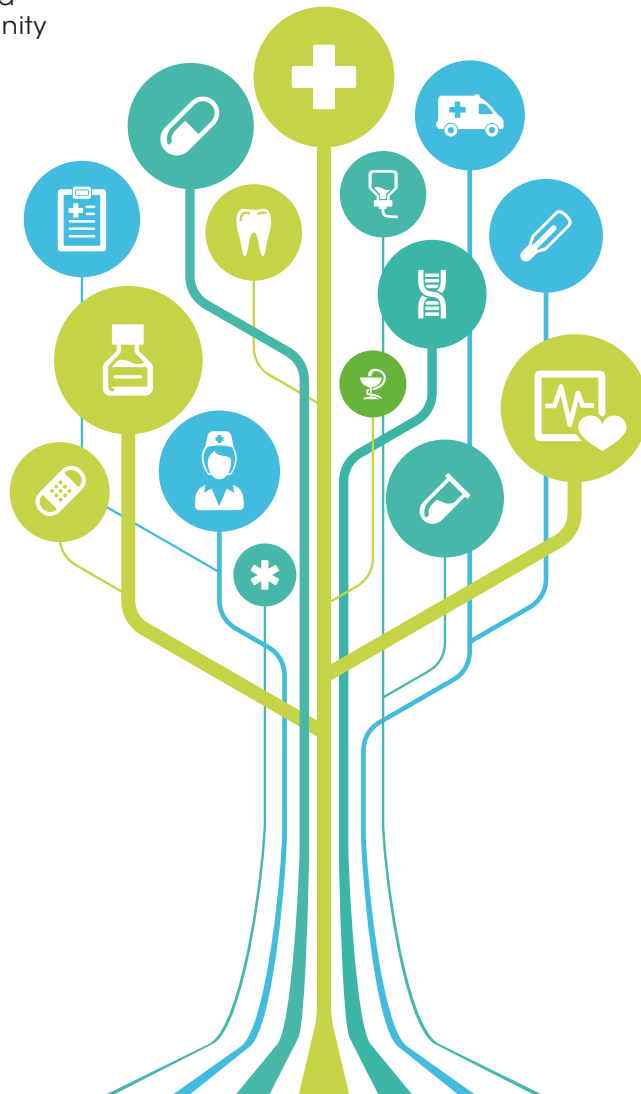
Patients and consumers are increasingly demanding the safe, appropriate, effective and informed health care that is their right.

Yet many health professionals in a wide range of health care settings do not have access to the health care information they need, when they need it, to learn, to diagnose, and to save lives. This leads directly and indirectly to misdiagnosis, errors in treatment and unnecessary suffering, disability or death. It also has a profound negative impact on health professionals themselves.

- Too often, health professionals are wrongly blamed for adverse clinical events that are primarily due to system failure, including lack of access to health care information. This includes access to critical information, such as medication safety, that has not yet been published in articles and reviews.
- Access to health care information is a vital part of continuing professional development and keeping up to date. Without information, health professionals are condemned to replicate often out-dated models of care. They have little opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills.

- Disempowerment of health professionals leads to loss of patients' confidence in the abilities of health professionals, further eroding professional self-worth.
- Up to date and easily accessible information is critical for health professionals to appropriately advise and accurately educate their patients and the public. For example, if a medicine's formulation has been changed and needs special storage requirements, or there are new side effects noted.

Health care information needs are contextual - geographical, epidemiological and socio-cultural. They are highly variable in place and time, and according to different health professionals in different clinical circumstances. There is no 'magic bullet'. Rather, a variety of approaches is required.



STAND UP FOR POSITIVE PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS

Health professionals have a responsibility to keep themselves informed and up to date where adequate relevant and reliable information is available. Where such information is not available it is the responsibility of health managers, governments and the international community to provide it.

When health professionals lack access to the health care information they need, especially in low-income countries at the levels of primary and district care, an information-empowered Positive Practice Environment can support by:

- **a focus on verifying, understanding and meeting the information needs of the health workforce**, both to ensure evidence-based health care and to ensure professional job satisfaction, as part of a broader supportive environment that values and motivates the health professional;
- **availability of high quality, reliable, relevant** and up-to-date evidence at the point of care, to inform clinical decisions;
- **provision of training in information skills**, including retrieval, critical appraisal, and synthesis;
- **a partnership with patients** and the public to ensure that the relevant and appropriate information, from the patients' point of view, is provided to them; and
- **opportunities for personal and group study** (workplace, library, home) to support learning from peers, continuing education and professional development.

It is vital not only to ensure that health professionals have access to health care information, but that they are given appropriate support and training in knowing how to search for, appraise and apply information in practice. A practice environment without adequate health care information support will fail to deliver effective care, leading to a loss of trust and confidence among the health team members as well as the entire community served by the facility.

Let's join in commitment and action to create quality workplaces for quality care.



This revised fact sheet was initially prepared in 2008 by Neil Pakenham-Walsh and fellow members of the Healthcare Information for All by 2015 (HIFA2015) Steering Group with inputs from the PPE Secretariat. HIFA2015 is now Healthcare Information for All (HIFA), a global health network with more than 18,000 members (health workers, librarians, publishers, researchers, policymakers...) committed to the progressive realisation of a world where every person has access to the healthcare information they need to protect their own health and the health of others. See www.hifa.org.

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