

Delegation of WHO visits PM&DC President to align medical and public health education with Primary Health Care (PHC) needs of Pakistan

Islamabad, April 28, 2025: A high-level delegation from the World Health Organization (WHO) visited the President of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) today to strengthen collaboration aimed at aligning medical and public health education with the evolving Primary Health Care (PHC) needs of Pakistan.

During the meeting, discussions focused on the establishment and improving of primary health care centers and units revising medical and public health curricula to better address the country's health priorities and ensure future healthcare professionals are equipped with the skills and knowledge essential for delivering comprehensive, community-centered care. The delegation emphasized the importance of producing a health workforce that can effectively respond to the growing challenges of non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, mental health, and emerging health emergencies.

The PM&DC President welcomed the WHO delegates, and apprised that "Our shared goal is to create a responsive, equitable, and sustainable healthcare system by strengthening the foundation of medical education," said the President. "We value WHO's technical expertise and continued support in this vital endeavor."

The delegation was comprised of Mr. Ravaghi Hamid (Regional advisor), Mataria Awad (Director), Gedik Fetheya Gulin (coordinator), Dr. Mohsin Raza, (consultant health Financing), Syed Shamsuzzoha Babar (Unit head), Dr. Naveed Asghar (National professional officer health system), Ms. Tahira Ali (Community Engagement Officer) and Dr. Samia Latif (consultant communicable disease control).

The President of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC), Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj, responding to several questions from the WHO delegation, highlighted the initiatives taken by PM&DC regarding the establishment and strengthening of Primary Health Care (PHC) centers and units.

He informed the delegation that PM&DC has directed all affiliated medical and dental colleges to establish outreach centers either at their teaching hospitals or by utilizing existing Basic Health Units (BHUs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) within their respective regions. The objective of this initiative is to enhance practical training for students, promote community health improvements, and raise public health awareness and education.

Dr. Taj pointed out that people living in remote and suburban areas of Pakistan often have to travel to major cities for even basic healthcare services, leading to financial and emotional hardship. Establishing accessible PHC centers in all provinces, particularly in underserved regions, is therefore crucial to ease the burden on these communities.

He further stated that PM&DC has initiated steps to integrate Primary Health Care into the medical education undergraduate curriculum to help students understand its fundamental importance early in their training. He emphasized that over the past year, PM&DC has placed strong focus on these issues, ensuring that its stringent criteria are applied across the 185 medical and dental colleges in the country, in line with WHO's standards for doctor-to-patient ratios and faculty requirements.

In the course of the discussion, the President apprised the WHO delegation that Primary Health Care concepts have already been incorporated into the undergraduate medical curriculum. He also mentioned that further integration of Public Health and Family Medicine is being planned at the postgraduate level, replicating PM&DC's obligation to comprehensive healthcare education reform.

He further apprised the delegation that the PM&DC Academic Board, is a team of experts and relevant stakeholders, is actively working on new initiatives aimed at facilitating healthcare access and improving services for the public at large.

Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj added that, for the first time, PM&DC has introduced a curriculum comprising 1,700 hours for medical and allied health sciences education, and 75 mandatory hours specifically dedicated to Family Medicine. He shared that PM&DC had sent 123 letters to affiliated colleges requesting the inclusion of Family Health Care and Primary Health Care modules, and 44 colleges have so far responded positively.

He also highlighted that PM&DC is working on future curriculum reforms that will include Primary Health Care leadership skills, greater integration between different healthcare disciplines, as well as a stronger focus on medical ethics and communication skills.

Concluding the discussion, Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj informed the delegation that PM&DC has achieved several significant milestones over the past two years. He announced that the Council is preparing to launch Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Continuing Medical Education (CME) programs. Once launched, PM&DC's revalidation processes will be linked to participation in these programs, ensuring that doctors continuously enhance and refresh their skills and knowledge to meet contemporary healthcare standards.