

Dr. Yahya Wardak's Interview with Ashna TV on the Health System of Afghanistan

It is strongly pledged in the National Health Policy of Afghanistan to deliver healthcare services to the nationals. In this policy, Ministry of Public Health has focused on the management and solidarity of the human and financial resources. Insecurity, poverty, lack of medical personnel specifically women, and limited and invalid resources are the serious challenges in offering health services.

Experts of public health believe that medical personnel should make more effort in delivering health services. To discuss the issue, we are having interview with Dr. Yahya Wardak from Germany through Skype to share his views and experience with us regarding the services he has offered in Afghanistan.

Welcome Dr. Wardak. As the first question, since you have traveled to many provinces of Afghanistan and offered support in the medical field, what do you think why the public health services in general are not properly delivered to the people in Afghanistan?

Yahya Wardak: first of all, Salam Alaikum to you and the audience of Ashna TV.

Ashna: Walaikum Salam

Yahya Wardak: The awkward situation of health system in Afghanistan has different causes that can be divided into two categories: the first category is general causes that are out of the system, and the second one is internal causes.

As everyone knows, its general, external causes include the poverty in Afghanistan as well as the continuous war of 30-40 years that still goes on and causes people to move from one place to another such as from rural areas to the cities, or sometimes immigrants return from foreign countries. All of such reasons affect the healthcare system. The second category is internal causes that are inside the system. One of them is that the foundation of the system is not strong enough from the very beginning. Or if some organizations were built, they were destroyed as a result of the war. In spite of a great deal of donation given to the country that resulted in some improvement, the works done in this respect are not done foundationally.

For example, the International Community donates money to Afghanistan in health sector, which is then submitted to the Ministry of Public Health. Unfortunately, as the ministry does not have a comprehensive plan to utilize the fund in offering health services, it has made agreements with some third-party organizations and NGOs to implement the fund in the health sector.

Ashna: To specify, what should be done to increase the awareness in the society about the public healthcare services, and who should do it?

Yahya Wardak: The public awareness starts from families by parents and goes on through schools to universities; the media can also play a role in it. And, for the health system, we should have well-educated doctors and other medical personnel. One of the problems in this regard is that unfortunately the number of doctors in Afghanistan is far less in comparison to the population. According to statistics, there are two or four doctors per each ten thousand people. While in the neighboring countries, this number is twice or three times higher, and it's very high in other developed countries. Also, the doctors and medical personnel are not properly educated in our country. I have seen in the medical faculties that students use chapter

notes, which are written twenty to thirty years back, as the learning materials. They learn these low quality materials by rote learning.

Ashna: Okay, we'll talk about it later. Now, as you have visited the rural parts of the country that are deprived of even basic health services and pressing need the services, what's your idea about it and what should immediately be done in this regard?

Yahya Wardak: Yeah, little attention and support are given to all the rural areas of Afghanistan in general. As I witnessed in Goshta district, a clinic was somewhat constructed, but in spite of urgent need, it couldn't yet find an obstetrician-gynecologist. So, those areas face with lack of medical staff.

Ashna: I tried to display some picture of the textbooks that you mentioned, but it seems to be technical shortcomings; anyways. As you have offered support in health and some other sectors in Afghanistan, what's your suggestion to the public people and helping organizations? Sometimes people claim that they don't need the aids that're given to them, so what kind of support should be offered to accommodate the needs of people?

Yahya Wardak: Prior to any kind of help, project or service, evaluation should be carried out in the specific area to figure out the people's needs and problems, then based on the results, the service should be started and continued.

In case of my work of publishing textbooks, I witnessed the problem of lack of textbooks at Afghan universities, then I started the work. I didn't design the work as a project abroad to apply it in Afghanistan. Another point is that whenever any organization or person starts offering service or a project, they have to keep in mind that the work could be temporary and for a certain time, so they should make sure how the people will continue receiving the service if the support is not available. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan, this point is not given attention to. In terms of Public health, if the international aids are not provided, most of the public hospitals and service providers will face with big challenges. In my opinion, the public health system of Afghanistan is like a patient in bed.

Ashna: So, what should be the alternative plan? The foreign support will definitely be lessened. Also, Afghan government officially says that it wants to be economically self-sufficient and to increase its income for offering services. Yet, if both the international aids and government's income are not enough, what should be the next plan or option to follow?

Yahya Wardak: Yeah we can take advantage of some other options, views and international experience for example the insurance. Also, as the number of private medical hospitals raises day by day, there should be coordination and collaboration between them and the governmental clinics. The public clinics are said to offer services for free, but in reality they don't. I think, a comprehensive analysis should be carried out, based on which emergency support could be offered. Yet, health as well as other sectors in Afghanistan need a long-term plan, because on one hand, international support will be stopped, and on the other hand, in the coming ten years, the population of Afghanistan will be some fifty million as each Afghan family has five to six children. Yet there is no plan for the future in the education, higher education and health sectors. Since the time passes, we have to work in advance to deal with the coming challenges and problems because they can't be resolved immediately.

Ashna: Ok, based on your advice, there should be a great deal of cooperation among private and public clinics and organizations, and the cooperation should be increased among them. Thanks you Dr. Yahya Wardak for your time and sharing your experience and views through the live program of Ashna TV.

Yahya Wardak: Thank you.

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