

Report for the Chui's Student Excellence Scheme (Ho King Chun Leadership Fund)
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Youth Pre World Health Assembly 2017 and World Health Assembly 2017

I have always been intrigued by the diversity in health and medicine. To me, medicine is much more than merely the study of diseases. Instead, medicine offers vast possibilities ranging from scientific research, public health advocacy, humanitarian work and more. It also creates numerous opportunities for interprofessional and cross-boundary collaboration for the betterment of health. My ongoing involvement with international medical student organizations has been driven by my passion for global health. Therefore, the chance to attend the prestigious Youth Pre-World Health Assembly Workshop 2017 (Pre-WHA) and represent medical students at the 70th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva is indeed a dream come true.

Having served in the Executive Committee of the Asian Medical Students' Association Hong Kong (AMSAHK) for two years, I gradually became familiar with the work of our parent organization, the International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA), also the organizer of the Youth Pre-WHA. IFMSA is recognized as a non-governmental organization within the United Nations' system and the World Health Organization. Every year, IFMSA sends a delegation to the World Health Assembly (WHA) – an annual meeting attended by WHO officials, member states and non-state actors to discuss health policies, budget and related issues. To ensure meaningful youth participation in the global health decision-making process, IFMSA hosts the Pre-WHA Workshop to introduce delegates to global health diplomacy and equip them with the essential skills for health advocacy work at the WHA.

The Youth Pre-WHA Workshop 2017 hosted at Graduate Institute of Geneva was a rigorous five-day training programme comprising of keynote speeches, panel discussions and interactive seminars. Activities were centered around IFMSA's four key focuses for the 70th WHA, namely non-communicable diseases, migrants' health, adolescents' health and human resources for health, which were all pertinent global health issues that we as future healthcare providers feel strongly about. One of the most important tasks we had during the workshop was to draft policy statements, which were essentially documents outlining IFMSA's stance on the above health issues. These would be later distributed to delegates at the WHA as a health advocacy tool. I was deeply grateful to have met renowned speakers such as Dr. Maria Neira, Director of WHO's Public Health and the Environment Department; Dr. Luiz Loures, Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS; and even Her Royal Highness Princess Dina Mirad of Jordan, President-elect of the Union for International Cancer Control.

Nonetheless, what I enjoyed most was the rare opportunity to work alongside 39 other passionate young minds. "Diverse" was undoubtedly the best word to describe the IFMSA delegation. We came from different countries and various healthcare fields, including medicine, pharmacy, veterinary science, nutritional science and public health. Our unique cultural backgrounds and most importantly, our common passion for global health, fueled heated debates and fruitful discussions. It was eye-opening to learn about other delegates' first-hand experience with health issues in their respective countries, such as the rise of obesity and diabetes related to the sales of sugary drinks in Ghana and the refugee health crisis in the European region.

After thorough preparation, it was finally time for the long-awaited 70th World Health Assembly. The extensive agenda covered typical issues such as non-communicable diseases, communicable diseases, health systems and the health of women, children and adolescents, while highlighting timely global health concerns such as health emergencies, in response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak, and migrant health, in response to the ongoing refugee crisis. What's more, this year marks the end of Dr. Margaret Chan's 10-year tenure as Director-General of the WHO, hence the election of the new Director-General also took place at the 70th WHA. I had the precious opportunity to attend most plenaries and committee sessions, as well as side events hosted by respected organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Diabetes Foundation.

Our main goal as IFMSA delegates was to make a positive difference in health policy making by exerting our influence as young healthcare students. While this may sound vague and impossible, we implemented a concrete plan of action. Firstly, owing to IFMSA's official status in the WHO, we delivered policy statements during committee sessions in front of all member state delegations, making our voices heard. Secondly, we reached out directly to the member state delegations by scheduling individual meetings via email, or simply by greeting them in the hallways during breaks. We introduced them to IFMSA and exchanged views on health issues we are working on. For example, I was glad to have met Hong Kong's Director of Health, Dr. Constance Chan, and her colleagues, and had a brief discussion about the participation of medical students in international global health events such as the WHA. Thirdly, we utilized our strength on social media and published numerous updates on Twitter, to keep IFMSA's student members and partners updated about our work at the WHA. Although the role of medical students in the global health arena can be very limited, I am glad to have contributed to IFMSA's continuous effort in global health advocacy and youth engagement.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Chui's Student Excellence Scheme for their generous support in making all this possible. As clichéd as it may sound, this opportunity to witness global health diplomacy in action can only be described as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. From witnessing the election of a new WHO Director-General, visiting the WHO headquarters, listening to Dr. Margaret Chan speak in person, to observing political debates on global health, the Youth Pre-WHA Workshop and the 70th World Health Assembly might as well be every medical students' dream. As I reflect on my two-week venture in Geneva, I realized the importance of adopting an upstream approach in health care, focusing on health policy rather than disease treatment, on prevention rather than cure. Once comprehensive health policies are in place, for instance sugar tax or free vaccinations, the emergence of diseases can be slowed down, effectively cutting healthcare expenditure. I also noticed with the current jam-packed curriculum in Hong Kong's medical schools, little emphasis is placed on global health diplomacy. I believe many medical students have the potential to become future healthcare leaders of our society and the world. To make my experience in Geneva a sustainable one, I will continue to be involved in global health advocacy campaigns both locally and globally, with hopes to inspire likeminded students around me.



The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) delegation
at the 70th World Health Assembly



At Palais de Nations, United Nations Headquarters, where the 70th World Health Assembly is held



At the World Health Organization Headquarters, where I attended a Q&A session with Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, ex-Director-General of WHO



With the Hong Kong delegation at the 70th World Health Assembly – Dr. Constance Chan (right third) and her colleagues from the Department of Health



Hong Kong delegates and HRH Princess Dina Mirad of Jordan



Opening of the 70th World Health Assembly



Dr. Margaret Chan speaking at a side event on attacks on healthcare workers



Attending a global surgery side event with IFMSA delegates from Morocco, Sudan and Singapore