PMAC PRINCE MAHIDOL AWARD CONFERENCE 2021

PL1

WHAT HAS THE WORLD LEARNED FROM COVID-19?

| BACKGROUND

In one of the first speeches after his appointment, Tedros Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General, noted that 'in an interconnected world, we are only as strong as our weakest link.' No country is safe if disease transmission is active in some parts of the world. COVID-19 hit the wealthiest countries hard, with effects far beyond health, while some middle- and lower middle-income countries managed to get their situations under control. In addition to the levels of pandemic preparedness, the disparities reflect the characteristics of the various health systems, such as emphasis on primary health care, extent of public funding for health care, public-private mix in healthcare delivery and adequacy of human resources in health. COVID-19 is confirming the importance of community engagement and ownership, and informed and community-supported self-directed health and hygiene behaviours of each individual in controlling the pandemic. 'Solidarity' has become a symbol of the COVID-19 response – from the global level and down to the grassroots. One remarkable achievement has been demonstrated in healthcare facilities. To save lives when the flood of patients was overwhelming hospitals and ICUs, national and international aid teams were sent – either voluntarily or through their organizations -- to create and maintain surge capacity.

Now that some countries have successfully managed to bring the first wave of COVID-19 under control, it is time to take an early look back and consider what could have been done differently to improve outcomes in all countries. In advance of COVID-19, a series of infectious threats --SARS, highly pathogenic avian influenza virus infection, MERS, and the first pandemic of the century, 2009 H1N1 influenza – had already established a pattern of potential but imminent pandemic emergence, and adoption of IHR(2005) by all Member States should have pushed development of core capacities for detection, reporting, and mitigation to the top of the priority list for national and international leaders and their communities. However, countries have often failed to deliver on this mandate due to other pressing priorities and, notably, a lack of financial commitment: response overrides preparedness. How did these lapses affect countries' readiness for and response to COVID-19?

Webinar sessions under sub-theme 1 have addressed lessons learned so far in key areas such as governance, communication, socio-economic impact and readiness/preparedness of countries. Chairs of each webinars will discuss about the outcomes or their sessions and build together a framework to better manage future pandemics. The analytical framework will comprise a list of lessons learned and key actionable recommendations, translating collective experience into action.

| OBJECTIVES



Panelist

Ian Smith

Head of Secretariat, Global Preparedness Monitoring Board

World Health Organization
Switzerland

Dr Ian Smith is head of the secretariat of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board. Co'-chaired by Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland and Mr Elhadj As Sy, the GPMB comprises political leaders, agency principals and world-class experts, and provides an authoritative, independent, comprehensive, inclusive global mechanism that apprises key policy makers and the world of system-wide progress towards increased preparedness and response capacity for outbreaks and other emergencies with health consequences It was established by the WHO Director-General and the President of the World Bank in 2018. Dr Smith also serves as a senior advisor to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, having previously served as Executive Director of the Office of the Director- General and Advisor to the two previous Director-Generals, Dr Margaret Chan and Dr Lee Jong-wook.