World Health Care Educators Convene to Discuss the Next Chapter

After the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care educators are rethinking how to prepare future generations to serve their patients best, and they shared ideas at the opening of the International Conference on the Future of Health Education held on the Coral Gables Campus.

While more doctors, nurses, and other health professionals are graduating from a larger number of medical schools across the world today, there is still a large gap between this workforce and what is needed to meet the rapidly growing global patient demand.

University of Miami President Julio Frenk, left, led a discussion about the future of global health care during a conference on the Coral Gables Campus this week.
This problem was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Julio Frenk, University of Miami president and a noted global public health expert, said Wednesday at the opening of the conference.

“When you look at the numbers—even with a growth of doctors and nurses—the shortage is abysmal,” said President Frenk, adding that most health care professionals migrate to high-income nations, which means low- and middle-income nations are struggling the most. “It will take all the resources to educate the health workforce we need in all countries. And we need to leverage technology to close those gaps.”

President Frenk, along with Latha Chandran, M.D., M.P.H., executive dean and founding chair of the Miller School of Medicine’s Department of Medical Education, and Lincoln C. Chen, M.D., president emeritus of the China Medical Board, were three of the lead authors on a paper published recently in The Lancet about changes needed to sustain health education in the wake of the pandemic and beyond.

Along with several other authors, they stressed the need for a competency-based health care curriculum that is focused on capabilities, as well as programs that give students a chance to work with a range of health professionals and to learn key skills in collaboration, so they will be prepared for the workplace. They also highlighted the strengths of a blended curriculum that incorporates online and in-person lessons when they are most impactful.

“We have the duty to build a better normal,” President Frenk said. “It’s the least we can do for the 20 million people who lost their lives in the COVID-19 pandemic, those who lost family members, or for children who were orphaned by the
Insights and Ideas from Global Experts

Throughout the conference, health experts from across the United States and the globe gathered to join panel discussions led by Felicia Knaul, Ph.D., professor of public health at the Miller School and director of the University’s Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas, and Barry Issenberg, M.D., who leads the Gordon Center for Simulation and Medical Innovation. They also attended presentations led by Henri Ford, M.D., M.H.A., dean of the Miller School, and Cindy Munro, Ph.D., R.N., dean of the School of Nursing and Health Studies, about the future of health education and new avenues for teaching health care.

In particular, Dean Ford described the NextGenMD curriculum adopted by the Miller School in 2020, which focuses on a competency-based educational model. This includes integrating patient care earlier and encouraging students to pursue a chosen path of scholarship so that they can couple their clinical experience with laboratory research during medical school.

Dr. Munro described how the School of Nursing and Health Studies uses its Simulation Hospital Advancing Research and Education to help students get experience treating patients in a range of medical facilities—such as an emergency room, typical hospital room, a one-bedroom apartment, and even an ambulance bay.

President Frenk said that he hopes the conference will serve as a chance for health educators to brainstorm about how they can attract new talent into health care and retain them at a
time when stress from the pandemic has led many to leave the field. Specifically, he cited some of the recommendations from *The Lancet* publication, which also recommended teaching some “adaptive competencies” to health care professionals, like the importance of work-life balance, so that these individuals will be able to thrive.

Dr. Chandran said she was thrilled with the first two days of the conference and has already learned many new ideas she hopes to share with the faculty at the Miller School.

“We have leaders in global health from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America all coming together to think about the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and trying to sustain and develop health education programs with great principles like equity and justice, so that health care can be accessible to all,” she said. “It’s been an incredible experience.”