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Editorial

Global Health Research and Innovation: A New Mission of Prince of Songkla University

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The current global landscape presents a profound crisis that challenges fundamental principles of fairness, equity, and a rights-based approach to health, as well as broader developmental goals. This crisis has undermined trust among various stakeholders and disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities. To address these challenges, it is essential to form coalitions comprised of individuals, institutions, and organizations that share a common value system and a proven record of accomplishments. There are three significant shifts that are particularly concerning for global health and welfare: 1) escalating damage to human societies and the environment, 2) increasing inequality across nations, and 3) growing complexity of politics and governance at the national, regional and global level.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a strategic plan to combat these challenges. As we approach the crucial decade of SDG implementation, the academic community must collaboratively act to ensure inclusivity in every domain. Health occupies a pivotal role in the SDGs, particularly in SDG-3, which aims to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages." This goal underscores the importance of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and equitable access to quality healthcare. UHC, in turn, is both a contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development and has multiple linkages with other SDGs—such as poverty alleviation, nutrition, gender equality, and education. Hence, university researchers and the broader community should adopt a holistic approach and work in close collaboration at all levels, not only health-related organizations or institutes.

Before the emergence of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the healthcare system was already riddled with disparities, inefficiencies, and ethical dilemmas. The pandemic exacerbated these issues, revealing systemic flaws at all levels, from central institutions to local communities. However, the crisis has also accelerated technological innovations that can address these challenges. The global context indicates a turning point for rapid technological advancements, as exemplified by the surge in e-commerce following the severe acute respiratory syndrome pandemic. While it remains to be seen how digital tools and e-learning will evolve post-COVID-19, these sectors remain robust areas for investment. The pandemic underscored the critical need for knowledge dissemination across various sectors, and technologies like artificial intelligence could play a vital role in achieving UHC and ensuring that no one is left behind.

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As we enter a new phase in public health, policymakers may not necessarily possess the knowledge or take appropriate actions to meet emerging needs. The recent pandemics have vividly demonstrated that local actions have global repercussions and vice versa. Thailand, and more specifically Prince of Songkla University (PSU), possesses a wealth of human resources, research capabilities, and innovation. The university should proactively engage in multidisciplinary collaborations with global partners to convert local experiences and innovations into evidence-based solutions that can adapt to the changing global health landscape.

Regarding the initiation of the 'Center for Global Health Research and Innovations,' the center aims to leverage the multi-disciplinary expertise available at PSU, not only from the Department of Epidemiology but also from the Faculty of Medicine and other Faculties. The objective is to generate evidence and create innovative approaches for health-related challenges. With accumulated years of experience in various aspects of healthcare—ranging from communicable and non-communicable diseases to mental health—the Department of Epidemiology at PSU is well-positioned to broaden its collaborative roles both nationally and globally. Not leveraging the collective professional expertise within the faculties at PSU would be a missed opportunity. The timing is optimal for PSU to take the lead in driving this initiative, positioning itself as a pioneer in global health research and innovations through collaborative efforts with experts on a global scale.

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