

CONFERENCE REPORT

7th International Conference on Human Values in Higher Education: Education for holistic human health

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Abstract

The 7th International Conference on "Human Values in Higher Education: Education for Holistic Human Health"(ICHVHE-18) was held from April 26 to 28, 2018, at Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan, Thimphu, Bhutan. This conference also celebrated the 50th year of Indo-Bhutan friendship. ICHVHE-18, was the culmination of the collaborative efforts of eight universities, two from Bhutan and six from India. The ICHVHE is an annual conference aimed at developing a shared vision of holistic, humane education, particularly in institutions of higher learning. The initial plan is to implement human values and education for holistic health in higher education within India and other SAARC nations. Delegates from five SAARC nations, viz, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives, participated in this conference. Ultimately, the effort is to provide universal human value-based education to every child, globally.

Purpose of the conference

Medical professionals have a greater responsibility to understand human behaviour and act appropriately by following professional ethics and sensitivity. It is recognised that the current medical system in many countries exploits patients, extorting huge sums of money while the healthcare provided is inadequate. So, the moral development of medical students must be given prime importance. But unfortunately, the evidence suggests that that this may actually be stunted (1). This may be the reason why several Indian medical universities have started incorporating subjects like Moral values and Ethics into their curriculum (1). Globally too, there is growing interest among medical students and educators in the promotion of "human" values in science and in relationships – both collective and individual – between doctors and their patients (2). Keeping in mind this urgent need, the aim of the conference was to develop guidelines, content and methodology for imparting Universal Human Values (UHV) in higher education, particularly in health education.

Inaugural session

After the national anthems of Bhutan and India and the traditional Marchand ceremony of welcome in Bhutan, Dr KP Tshering, Hon. President, Khesar Gyalpo University of Health Sciences of Bhutan, welcomed the chief guest, Her Majesty, the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuk, their Royal Highnesses, the Minister of Health, Government of Bhutan and other participants. Dr Tshering highlighted the aim of the conference to develop a holistic humane educational model particularly in institutions of higher education in India, Bhutan and other SAARC nations. In her inaugural address, Her Majesty, the Queen Mother stated that the present educational system is missing its core content which is to know the real purpose of life. Therefore, it has become an urgent need to incorporate universal human values (UHV) in all educational systems in order to address the negative impact of modernisation. She emphasised the need to inculcate human values starting from the home itself.

Keynote addresses

Four keynote addresses were delivered in this three-day conference. On Day 1, Professor Sri Ganesh Bagaria, from the Institute of Human Education, Sanskar, Kanpur, spoke on the "Basic Human Aspiration - Wellbeing of All". He linked the wellbeing of all with a healthy environment. On Day 2, Dr. Sharmila Asthana from Kanpur spoke about "Healthy Human Beings"; pointing out that health needs a perfect balance of body and mind to ensure harmony in the human being. She also emphasised the need to create awareness about right lifestyle behaviours and food choices. On the same day, Mr. Lopen Lungtaen Gyasto, President, College of Language and Cultural Studies, delivered a keynote speech on "Healthy Environment". He described the healthy environment at the level of family, society and ultimately the whole of nature. On Day 3, Dasho (Dr) Pema Thinley, Ex- Vice Chancellor, Royal University of Bhutan, in his keynote speech, talked about "Education for the Wellbeing of All", and the need for its comprehensive implementation.

Panel discussions

Panel discussions were organised on all three days of the conference on various aspects of UHV and health-related subjects. The key details are below:

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The current state of the human being and society, and the state of human health and healthcare systems

In this panel discussion, the current problems at the level of the individual, society, educational systems and at the level of health and healthcare systems were discussed. At the individual level, we face problems related to our right understanding of physical and emotional needs, lack of trust, and lack of healthy relationships. Terrorism, communal war, regionalism, corruption are problems damaging our social structure. In educational systems we come across problems related to drug abuse, alcoholism, ragging, sexual harassment, depression, and suicide, which make us question what exactly the present education is providing us with. The growing incidence of lifestyle disorders indicates that there is lack of health awareness among the people. There is an urgent need to develop a biophysical-spiritual healthcare model to control the situation. Issues such as increasing cost of medical facilities, unethical behaviour of medical and nursing professionals, commercialisation of healthcare systems were also highlighted by the discussants. It was felt that none of these problems are limited to any one society or country and participants of all the five countries agreed that they are facing such issues in their own societies. Though, we are making economic progress the feeling of deprivation still persists in society and is even growing. The participants felt that UHV gives some hope to resolve all these problems.

Approach towards human health: Need for change

This session was dedicated to discussions on our approach to improving human health and how that could be done at the level of the individual, society and healthcare systems. At the individual level, we need to work to motivate people and make them aware of their fundamental health needs. The society and healthcare systems have to work together for sustainable changes towards holistic health for the present and future generations. Most non-communicable diseases can be prevented by creating awareness among people. Healthcare systems need to emphasise the preservation and promotion of the health of the people, rather than just focusing on treatment.

Systems for holistic human health

The main points discussed in this session were ideal systems for holistic human health. The concept of holistic health includes understanding the inseparable relationship of mind and body and is a multi-dimensional approach encompassing physical, mental, social, spiritual and environmental aspects. This is possible only through the correct utilisation of the available resources. To provide healthcare in totality, an integrated approach involving all healthcare systems is needed. AYUSH and the modern medical system all need to work together to achieve this.

Implementing education for the wellbeing of all

In this panel discussion, implementing education for the wellbeing of all, its design, and the role of healthcare systems in moving towards that goal were discussed. Individuals and families need to be made aware that maintaining their health is their own responsibility, while medical systems are there to help them when necessary. Healthy mutual relationships in the family and society have an important role to play in the overall wellbeing of a person. Along with physical facilities we need to feel love, care, respect, support and mutual feelings of trust for those nearest to us, to facilitate a conducive environment to support our health. Education for wellbeing should ensure harmony at all levels of human existence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- The teaching of UHV to students and every individual is an urgent need.
- The UHV foundation course adopted by many institutes needs to be strengthened and scaled-up to cover more institutes, organisations, communities and workplaces.
- Regulatory bodies in India, namely the Medical Council, Dental Council, Council of Indian Medicine, Pharmacy Council, and Nursing Council will be given a proposal for the inclusion of UHV as a subject in their curricula.
- Developing formal curricula to offer integrated courses for medical and nursing professionals, which include human values and ethics, understanding each other's roles and responsibilities, improving interprofessional communication and motivating team work should be a priority.

Valedictory session

During the valedictory session, commitments were undertaken by the delegates desiring to make specific changes in the current education systems. The valedictory address was given by Dasho (Dr) Pema Thinley. The session ended with all the participants being guided through meditation, the traditional Bhutanese gong was played, and a prayer for the peace of the world was performed.

"Let there be no disease, no sickness, no suffering, in this place of ours and the whole universe, and let peace and harmony and prosperity prevail for all time to come"

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