

Universal Health Coverage for all is possible

The possibility of Kenya realizing universal health care for all is not a pipe dream; it is doable and achievable.

This is what came out at the 5th Nation Leadership Forum. Speaker after speaker drawn from various organizations in the healthcare divide gave their views on how universal health care can be achieved.

The panelists included Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, Governor, Makueni County, Dr. Rashid Aman, Chief Administrative Secretary, Ministry of Health, Dr. Rudi Eggers, World Health Organization Country Representative to Kenya, Dr. Githinji Gitahi, CEO, AMREF Health Africa, Dr. Nelly Bosire, Consultant Specialist Obstetrician/Gynecologist and Dr. Kihaki Kimani, Senior Lecturer Department of Ophthalmology, University of Nairobi.

A lot of reference was made to the initiative by Makueni County where every household invests Kshs. 500 and every person in the county gets covered.

“Our journey to the Universal Health Coverage was simple. We realized that if each of our 162,000 households paid Kshs. 500 per year, we would realize the same cash as when we charge patients at the point of treatment,” explained Prof. Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, Governor, Makueni County. “We are now at 70 percent coverage. We pay for the drugs from KEMSA.”

Being the world cup season, Dr. Gitahi tickled the audience when he linked football to health systems.

“We need to change our investment model and take money to the bottom and not at the top. We must focus on community healthcare champions. We must make them part of the system,” he said. “Harambee Stars signing up Cristiano Ronaldo will not get Kenya to the world Cup. In the same breath, Cuban doctors will not get us out of the woods, we need to invest in improving the systems.”

Dr. Aman pointed out the importance of re-engineering strategies so as to promote preventive medicine and champion change of lifestyle so that we can prevent non-communicable diseases.

Dr. Bosire touched on the issue of human resources for health.

“We have done a lot in training professionals for this sector but we need focus on retaining them here to give services to Kenyans,” she said. “We have 2000 general practitioners that we are wasting while we concentrate on importing specialists. If we employ them, a lot will be covered because they are the ones who will determine whether the patient needs a specialist or not.”

Dr. Kimani said that offering healthcare is teamwork.

“You need a team that is in cohesion,” she said. “Imagine the whole of Coast region has only one ophthalmologist who was posted there last year. This means that thousands of people in the Coast region cannot access such services.”

Dr. Eggers emphasized the importance of health covers.

“Universal health cover is very important to us as WHO,” he explained. “We want every person covered so that people do not have to cover their medical bills out of pocket.”

In his opening remarks, the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi emphasized the importance of ethics in health.

“Talking about health is talking about life. I challenge all of us to put high premium ethics in this sector,” he said. “The Government of Kenya has prioritized universal health coverage (UHC) in its Big 4 agenda. This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to squander! We must plan together, reason together and come up with solutions that will make us one proud healthy nation!”

The Nation Media Group CEO, Stephen Gitagama said that the Nation Leadership Fom was launched this forum in 2017 to provoke conversation around issues that can positively impact on the lives of Kenyans.