

Fostering public health leadership in Africa

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The 13th World Health Congress has been conducted between April 23-27, 2012 in Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) has successfully hosted the event. In addition to the various events that took place for promoting global public health, the occasion has also resulted in the official opening of the African Federation of Public Health Associations (AFPHA) with the convening of its first meeting and general assembly (1). This was certainly a golden opportunity for the enhanced promotion and development of public health activities in the region, and “the establishment of AFPHA provides an excellent opportunity for Africa to have its own role in shaping the regional and global public health agenda” (2).

Professional associations (especially those within the public health area) have major responsibilities for influencing national governments for the development and enforcement of appropriate legislations and for the establishment of strong institutions capable of mainstreaming health into the development agenda, working on health related policy and advocacy as well as mobilizing investments in health related research and development. Public health professional associations must also actively work for the advancement of a sense of stewardship among public sector health officials which in return should lead national leaders to stimulate civil society participation in health programs (3). The associations also have critical roles in monitoring and evaluation of trends in the health status of populations as well as the efforts to affect those trends in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other global health related targets.

It is, therefore, a remarkable and historic step that public health professionals have taken to formally launch the AFPHA, which was first initiated in 2004 and then officially established in September 2011, with the goal of working

towards entrenching the vision of Public Health in policies, programs and health projects in Africa as well as other countries in the Region. The main objectives of AFPHA, among others, are stimulating the development and supervision of national associations of public health in all countries in the Region, and promoting the development and application of the principles and practice of public health in Africa and the world (1).

The Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) had an opportunity to get its member elected as Vice President and President Elect of WFPHA at the 46th session of the General Assembly (4). For the EPHA, which is one of the very established public health associations in the Region (5), this opportunity will reaffirm its commitment for partnering with professional associations in health in the Region in their efforts to influence health policy and interventions within their countries. This will also have a symbolic role that will encourage the AFPHA in realizing its goals and in bringing about better public health in the continent.

References

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