

WHA71: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (2005)

ITEM 11.2.

I represent IntraHealth International, a US-based NGO partnering with WHO and the global health community to improve the performance of health workers and the systems in which they work.

IntraHealth International leads the secretariat of the Frontline Health Workers Coalition, an alliance of 42 US-based public and private organizations advocating greater and more strategic investment in frontline health workers, and we make this statement on its behalf.

The IHRs are indispensable to health security, especially for health workers on the frontlines in communities in low- and middle-income countries. Not surprisingly, communities with the least access to essential health services provided by frontline health workers are often the same communities that are most vulnerable to disease outbreaks, as we tragically witnessed during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and the Zika epidemic in Latin America in 2015.

Lack of access to health workers trained and supported to implement IHR capacities are a central reason only 20% of countries worldwide can adequately respond to a global health epidemic, and this will only worsen if the health workforce deficit continues to rise. The report of the High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth asserts that “weak health systems, with inadequate numbers of health workers, perform poorly” when preventing or controlling disease outbreaks, threatening lives and adversely impacting trade, travel, and tourism.

We urge WHO, member states, and all implementing partners to better align initiatives and investments, including the Joint External Evaluations, the Global Health Security Agenda, and the One Health Initiative, to ensure communities have access to frontline health workers with a diverse skill mix of IHR capacities. Workforce coordination and reporting efforts carried out through the IHRs must include concrete targets and adequate financing to address long-term, systemic needs of the health workforce.

Improving access to trained health workers able to implement IHR capacities and ensuring the health and safety of all health workers will help to develop economies that are more resilient to health-generated shocks, as well as accelerate progress toward the SDGs.