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ISPRM Joins 66th World Health Assembly to address Disability

ISPRM participated in the 66th World Health Assembly (WHA) of the World Health Organization (WHO), endorsing the WHO disability resolution which was adopted by Ministers of Health from WHO's 194 member states.

During the plenary session, ISPRM-WHO Liaison Officer, Prof. Christoph Gutenbrunner, made a statement highlighting rehabilitation as a health strategy to overcome disability and optimise functioning, as well as the need for research in rehabilitation. Other ISPRM representatives in Geneva included Prof. Marta Imamura (Brazil), Jorge Lains (Portugal), Alessandro Giustini (Italy) and Juan Manuel Guzman (Mexico).

According to WHO and the World Bank 1 billion people, 15 percent of the world population, live with disabilities across the world. The greatest burden of disability is on low income countries. These numbers will increase significantly as populations' age, the prevalence of chronic health conditions rises and as a result of environmental trends and other factors. Disability disproportionately affects vulnerable populations including women, older people and poor people.

The resolution on disability adopted by Ministers of Health calls for:

- implementation of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- national action plans to effectively remove barriers and enable persons with disabilities
- monitoring and evaluation systems to gather appropriate data on disability
- initiatives to ensure that all mainstream health services are inclusive of persons with disabilities.
- appropriate support services for informal caregivers
- promotion of habilitation and rehabilitation across the life-course and for a wide range of health conditions through early intervention; integrated and decentralized rehabilitation services, improved provision of wheelchairs, hearing aids, low vision devices and other assistive technologies; and training to ensure a sufficient supply of rehabilitation professionals to enable people with disabilities to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society.
- strengthening of integrated community-based support and services and prevention of discrimination in access to health care or health care services.

'This is an important step forward that will impact the lives of persons with disability across the world. There is still a lot to be done to ensure local impact and we look forward to the action plan that will be developed by WHO', says Marta Imamura, President of ISPRM.

ISPRM leaders, with support of the ISPRM secretariat, organized a highly interactive side-symposium with the private sector which expressed great interest in collaboration, particularly in raising public awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities and empowering them; in gathering data across institutions and countries and in working collaboratively for faster change at country /global levels.

During a technical briefing for the U.N. high-level meeting on disability and development which will take place in September in New York, Prof. Gutenbrunner made a statement on behalf of ISPRM about the need for specific education of health professionals about disability issues and the role of research and concepts to overcome disability.

ISPRM President and Chair of the ISPRM-WHO Liaison Committee also had the opportunity to attend a meeting of professional organisations in official relations with WHO in the field of disability and rehabilitation. Collaboration across many fields was discussed such as rehabilitation disaster relief, world report on Spinal Cord Injury (IPSCI), the International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI) and the new WHO initiative for wheelchair provision.

ISPRM, an NGO in official relations with WHO, is committed to working with its members in over 50 countries and its partners to face the challenge of the growing burden of disability worldwide and to promote rehabilitation medicine as a critical part of the solution.

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