

## **The Leadership We Want – YPL session 2017**

Traditionally, the highlight of the Young Physician Leaders (YPLs) programme is the session on the “Leadership we want”, incorporated in the programme of the World Health Summit (WHS). Our focus at the 2017’s session was ‘embracing diversity for better leadership’, thus improving healthcare.

Coming from different fields, everyone with her/his own distinctiveness, we managed to embrace our own diversity. This developed into a fruitful discussion and a demonstration of how powerful diversity can be. The audience responded very well to our message, and passionately joined the discussions during and after the session. We designed the discussion in a way that flowed through three panel sessions, each discussing different topics, transitioning one into another.

Our first panel discussed leadership versatility. Based on the work of Goleman (2002) on leadership styles, we discussed how different leaders use different approaches in guiding their teams. A leader can and should show versatility depending on the environment and the team itself. Many of us, as physicians, tend to see medicine as both science and art. Therefore, we tried to describe the science through music, in words and emotions, showing the six leadership styles through the orchestra conducting styles of different conductors. We then transferred this to practice, discussing our own styles and their applicability to our working environments, sending the message that good leaders adapt to their teams and the situation. Inspired by Virchow’s quote that “Medicine is a social science and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale”, we concluded that medicine does not consist only of our actions in the office or the ward, but of our actions in society as well. We hope that some people in the audience picked up this message and brought it over to their own working environment.

The second panel addressed the challenges of diversity in young leadership. We discussed different aspects, such as diversity of ethnicity, culture and language, diversity of age and hierarchy, and gender diversity.

With globalisation, every organisation becomes more and more international, adding cultural among the personal differences. It is important for a leader to be aware of the additional challenges this creates and endeavour to be open towards different cultures and approaches. Cultural diversity can be a particular challenge for minority groups within a working environment. Stigma and stereotypes can diminish the opportunity to connect with colleagues and reduce the potential for fully appreciating the quality in others. Thus, it is important for a leader to provide an environment where employees would be valued based on their work, regardless of their language or cultural and ethnic background. After all, the diversity of a working environment does not only present a challenge, but also has great potential, that - if properly acknowledged - can be a valuable asset.

Changes in global health, healthcare systems and society also require changes in leadership in the health sector. However, hierarchy sometimes restrains change. Although hierarchy potentially gives structure and fosters stability in the working environment, 'over-hierarchical' systems reduce creativity, innovation and ultimately work satisfaction. The correct balance is necessary for a prosperous working environment. As a young or future leader, it is particularly difficult to challenge consolidated structures - a mixture of persistence, empathy and patience are required in order to see changes come about.

Gender equality is one of the key goals that our generation aspires to push forward. The problem of gender inequality receives more attention nowadays, with reports stating how women earn less, have lower rates of accepted research articles in journals, and have less opportunity to get leadership roles and academic positions. In many countries, different actions have been undertaken in order to promote gender equality. However, inequality still persists worldwide; ranging from minor to enormous differences in access to education and job opportunities. We need both men and women to be more outspoken on this issue.

Finally, our third panel talked about innovation and sustainability of health systems. We discussed how innovation has been a source of rapid development across many industries. However, innovation is not growing as fast within the health system compared to other industries. Innovation is a fast-paced process that may involve taking risks during development and implementation phases. Not all innovative ideas and solutions are adaptable by healthcare systems; challenges do exist when it comes to budget and decisiveness, with uncertainty surrounding rapid innovation without long-term studies.

Innovation faces a greater challenge in academia. Science is an incremental process, whereas innovation is a fast-paced process that may be difficult to adopt in such a traditional setting. Reward systems and the bureaucratic processes in academia stimulate prolific incremental work. This may not fit 'fast forward' innovation that requires a high-risk investment. In addition, there is a lack of diversity in the traditional academic setting.

However, opportunities do exist. Slowly, some academic centres are starting to include patents as promotion criteria; academic centres are an established hub for human intellectual capital, they provide an environment that mixes young aspiring individuals with senior experts, providing the space for combining new ideas with experience. Competition between centres may drive investment in innovation, and by design, it is a nurturing environment.

Moving forward, innovation will find its way into the healthcare sector. It may be convoluted but it will likely reach every aspect of healthcare systems, especially care delivery. Lessons from industries show that fostering innovation requires a culture of trust, openness, and the need for figure-based discussion on adopting and implementing innovation in the organization. There will be a need to reform rewards, incentives, partnerships and industry support, as well as revisiting the review and approval processes to accelerate adoption and the growth of innovation in the healthcare system.

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