

Letter to the Editor

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Rethinking Health in Emergency Situations: A Holistic and Dynamic Approach

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The contemporary world faces multiple emergency situations that pose significant challenges to global health, spanning from birth to death.¹ Examples of such emergencies include the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Monkeypox outbreak, Afghanistan crisis, Northern Ethiopia crisis, Syria crisis, Ukraine emergency, and greater Horn of Africa.² These global emergencies highlight the need to rethink current health approaches.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in 1948 as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, going beyond the absence of disease or infirmity.³ This definition has important implications for implementation, policy, and health services and has compelled countries to consider social determinants of health in their health systems. However, it is no longer sufficient to address the new challenges posed by emergency situations.

The WHO defines a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) as an extraordinary event that constitutes a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease, potentially requiring a coordinated international response.^{4,5} These emergencies are serious, sudden, unusual, or unexpected, with implications for public health beyond national borders and may necessitate immediate international action.

To save millions of lives and improve global health systems, the global community needs a new definition of health that reflects the realities of the current era. This new definition should provide a general vision of health and generate new health determinants to address global concerns. By developing the concept of health in emergencies and considering its determinants, mankind can better prepare for disasters and critical events, requiring a revolution in health systems.

The new definition should encompass emergencies, as they can occur anywhere and at any time, necessitating new approaches, actions, and perspectives. The vulnerability of most countries and governments to various emergency situations throughout history underscores the need for fundamental changes and new health strategies worldwide. Without new definitions and approaches, health promotion is impossible. Adding the term “emergency” to the WHO’s definition of health will play a crucial role in guiding decisions made by managers and employees in the health sector.

Our proposed definition of health is as follows: “Health is a dynamic state of overall well-being, encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions, even in emergencies. It goes beyond the mere absence of disease and infirmity, striving for a balance of vitality, emotional resilience, and positive social connections, even amidst critical situations. This holistic view acknowledges the interplay of these aspects, promoting a life of purpose, fulfillment, and adaptability, even in the face of unforeseen challenges and emergencies.”

The importance of emergency situations cannot be overstated, as they can occur anywhere and at any time. New approaches, actions, and perspectives are required to address them. The various emergencies throughout history have shown that most countries and governments are vulnerable to such events. Fundamental changes are needed, and new health strategies must be developed worldwide.

The new definition must be thoroughly discussed among scholars and scientists to ensure its acceptance and implementation. Emergency situations must be considered an essential part of life, and the addition of the term to the health definition will lead to a better understanding of health determinants in such situations. Adherence to this new definition will enable us to pay serious attention to the social determinants of health in emergency situations, which can change in dimensions and effect.

The commitment and responsibility of international organizations, governments, and nations in emergency situations will increase based on the acceptance of the new definition. This new definition has been developed for pursuing health, particularly in emergency situations, and can predict future events in critical situations. A joint response is necessary to achieve a revolution in the health sector and save millions of lives.

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