

Foreword

Systems thinking has been applied to many specific health issues, but this book represents the first attempt to apply it to an entire health system. Furthermore, this book recognises that health systems are open systems that mutually interact with other systems. The Ministry of Health, Malaysia is proud to have participated actively with UNU-IIGH in the analytic process. It has been a highly beneficial mutual learning process. We have gained insights into critical elements in our past development, acquired better appreciation of our own strengths and limitations, and recognised opportunities to address the challenges we face.

The book highlights Malaysia's historical success in dealing with numerous health issues, mainly communicable disease and family/child health. Fortuitously, this book was completed in January 2020, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the lessons from our past successes were within living memory and provided the foundation on which the health system in Malaysia was able to build rapidly, engage with government, and respond effectively. The outbreak certainly tested the links between the various components of our health system – public health; laboratories; primary, secondary, and tertiary services; pharmaceutical and engineering (environmental health) services; human resources; and information, as well as governance and leadership. It has been a real-life verification of the importance of the analysis outlined in this manuscript – the links were strong and mutually supportive.

Malaysia continues to learn and to strengthen its health system to ensure the health of the population. I hope the key messages outlined in this book will be useful to policy makers and academics around the world. Further, I would recommend that engaging in an analytic process such as this would be a good learning process for staff in all health systems.

This was an ambitious venture, and I commend UNU-IIGH for the partnership and the rigour with which the process was undertaken. I am immensely proud of the past and present staff of the Ministry of Health who contributed to the effort.

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