

## A responsive health system to address population needs

Responsiveness is a key objective of national health systems. Responsive health systems anticipate and adapt to existing and future health needs, thus contributing to better health outcomes.<sup>[1]</sup> Responsive health systems aim to develop technical tools to assess, monitor and raise awareness of how people are treated, and the environment in which they are treated, when seeking healthcare. The concept of responsiveness was developed as part of a broader conceptual framework by the World Health Organization (WHO) on health systems in 2000, which identified three focuses for health system goals: health, responsiveness and financing fairness.<sup>[2]</sup> Subsequently, the WHO operationalised the concept through measurement across eight domains (autonomy, choice, communication, confidentiality, dignity, quality of basic amenities, prompt attention and access to family and community support) that aim to distinguish between aspects of health systems related to the rights of patients as human beings (such as the domain of dignity), and aspects related to how the system meets the needs of patients as clients of the system (such as the quality of healthcare facilities).<sup>[3]</sup>

The health system, like other social systems (such as justice and education), was expected by its population to meet a core goal plus, a common social goal expected of all social systems in addition to their main aim. As health systems' responsiveness is based on the experience of interaction between people and health system, it is important to recognise the voices of the people who use a health system. Three articles published in this issue

highlight the challenges of creating health systems that might be able to respond to the challenges in Ghana (the eradication of malaria in pregnancy)<sup>[4]</sup> and Malawi (the introduction of a health communication strategy)<sup>[5]</sup> in Africa, and in India (the initiation of an essential healthcare package in urban areas)<sup>[6]</sup> in Asia. These articles illustrate the need for strengthening health systems to make them more responsive to populations, with the goal of improving their health outcomes through universal health coverage.

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