

The emerging practitioner: 'Golden Thread' of Health Systems Strengthening

The collective work in this volume reflects a transition toward collaborative, patient-centred, and technology-integrated healthcare. While the collection is anchored in a specific geographic area, several contributions broaden the perspective to a more global or "Global South" discourse. A distinct international bridge is formed by the inclusion of research from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine (USA). This article which explores multimodal feedback for final-year students offers a Western, high-income country perspective on medical education.

The manuscripts underscore that improving health outcomes requires a combination of systemic efficiency, ethical clarity, and the empowerment of undergraduate researchers. The unifying thread connecting these manuscripts is the optimisation of health systems through the lens of emerging practitioners. Their inclusion in the journal suggests a scope that values comparative pedagogical strategies and recognises universal challenges in medical training, such as self-awareness and communication skills. While the topics range from artificial intelligence in cardiology to late antenatal care in rural Namibia, they are unified by a commitment to health systems strengthening (HSS) driven by undergraduate and early-career insight. This overarching theme can be organised into three interconnected pillars: identifying systemic barriers to access and quality; bridging the gap between theory and practice; and innovation as a tool for equity.

Chee and colleagues draw a distinction between health system *support* and health system *strengthening*.¹ *Support* refers to activities that improve health services by increasing inputs or filling immediate gaps. *Strengthening* involves fundamental, comprehensive changes to the performance drivers of the health system. It aims to enhance the system's inherent capacity to ensure the permanent improvement of resource management and deliver care effectively through the reform of policies and regulations.

For student research to effectively *strengthen* health systems, institutions should foster partnerships between academic bodies and health facilities to ensure research is need-based and interactive. This approach transforms students from passive learners into active contributors who can identify and leverage HSS opportunities within their local socio-cultural contexts, supported by mentorship from senior academic staff.

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1. Chee G, Pielemeier N, Lion A, Connor C. Why differentiating between health system support and health system strengthening is needed. *Int J Health Plann Manage* 2013;28(1):85-94. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpm.2122>