



**PROMOTION OF ACCREDITATION  
OF  
BASIC MEDICAL EDUCATION**

**A Programme within the Framework of the  
WHO/WFME Strategic Partnership to Improve Medical Education**

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## **Introduction**

This paper describes the present major programme resulting from the Strategic Partnership established by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) in 2004 to Improve Medical Education.

The WHO/WFME Strategic Partnership is an expression of the WHO commitment to support national efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals and also an important element of the implementation of the WFME Global Standards Programme.

The aim of this global initiative is to provide assistance to educational institutions and agencies in their endeavour to establish effective, reliable and transparent systems for accreditation or other types of recognition of medical schools and their educational programmes.

Accreditation of basic medical education should be seen as an essential procedure in reform processes and quality improvement of medical education.

## **Background**

WFME has an extensive record of global initiatives with WHO to improve standards of medical education and hence improvement in health care delivery systems of countries worldwide. WHO and WFME collaborated intensively in both the 1988 World Conference and the 1993 World Summit on Medical Education. Each of these major ventures were followed by World Health Assembly resolutions framed by WHO and WFME and endorsed by all member states: WHA Resolution 42.38 of 1989, calling on governments of all member states to implement principles of the Edinburgh Declaration, and the WHA Resolution 48.8 of 1994, which charged member states to reform their medical education systems to be congruent with and supportive of national health care systems. In addition to close collaboration with the WHO Geneva Headquarters, WFME has always maintained close links with the WHO Regional Offices.

The main steps for the present initiative were:

- Launching the WFME Global Standards Programme in 1997
- Definition of the WFME Global Standards in Basic Medical Education as part of the Trilogy of Global Standards for Quality Improvement of Medical Education, developed by three international task forces and published by WFME in 2003
- Broad international endorsement of the Global Standards Programme at the 2003 World Conference in Medical Education *Global Standards for Medical Education – For Better Health Care* in March 2003 in Copenhagen, Denmark
- Testing the Standards in Pilot Studies 2002-2005
- Implementation of the Global Standards Programme in terms of dissemination of information, translations, and wide-spread use of the Standards by educational institutions and recognition/accreditation bodies

- Development of a WFME Advisor function in 2004-2005
- Definition of the WHO/WFME Guidelines for Accreditation of Basic Medical Education, developed by an international task force in 2004 and published by WHO and WFME in 2005.

### **Perspectives of accreditation systems**

Present challenges in medical education and its relationship to health care systems have enforced a need for accreditation or similar quality assurance systems of basic medical education.

The concept of accreditation is used in various ways in higher education. Fundamental principles of the WHO/WFME guidelines for accreditation of basic medical education are the use of medical education specific standards, the endeavour to create transparency of accreditation systems and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in accreditation procedures.

One problem in establishing accreditation systems is the risk of bureaucracy and resource demands. One perspective of the WFME programme will be to investigate possibilities of developing less bureaucratic but still reliable accreditation procedures.

### **Main elements in the process of accreditation**

The WHO/WFME Guidelines state that for accreditation of basic medical education the process should include the following stages:

- Institutional self-evaluation of the medical school
- External evaluation based on the report of self-evaluation and a site visit
- Final report by the review team containing recommendations regarding the decision on accreditation
- Decision on accreditation.

The Guidelines also include recommendations regarding accreditation systems:

- Fundamental requirements
- Legal framework
- Organisational structure
- Standards or criteria to be used
- Needs for public announcement of decisions and
- Benefits of accreditation.

### **The WFME package for assistance in establishing accreditation**

In general, WHO and WFME are not accreditation bodies. However, within the framework of the WHO/WFME Strategic Partnership, WFME has decided to provide a programme for assisting medical schools and national agencies and authorities in establishing accreditation of basic medical education.

The package for assistance includes the following:

#### *National specification of the WFME Global Standards for basic medical education:*

The WFME Global Standards recognise that there is a need for national/regional specification of the global standards, which has been confirmed in a number of studies that used the WFME Standards. This includes specification or supplementing the Standards, especially the annotations to the standards. This work will be conducted in co-operation with national experts.

#### *Assistance in the institutional self-evaluation:*

From a number of pilot studies, which have been conducted to validate the WFME Global Standards in basic medical education and other examples of using the Standards, it is evident that in many cases there is a need for specific assistance to the medical school to supplement the general information and advice produced by WFME.

#### *External review by WFME Advisors of the institutional self-evaluation report:*

The value of reviewing self-evaluation reports by external experts, who are familiar with the WFME Standards, has been documented by experiences of some accreditation systems.

#### *Site visit to the medical school by a WFME external review team:*

The composition of the team will be determined by the specific objectives and decided upon in co-operation with the institution. Generally, the team will include a combination of national and international experts.

#### *Formulation of the final evaluation report:*

A final evaluation report will be formulated by the external review team, taking into account comments from the institution in question to the preliminary report.

#### *Development of an accreditation organisation and accreditation council and procedure for accreditation:*

Recommendations from WFME will be developed in co-operation with relevant national stakeholders.

### **Potential clients**

The programme has been planned to support:

- Medical schools
- National bodies dealing with recognition/accreditation of medical schools
- Regional organisations in the field of medical education.

### **Forms of assistance**

WFME assistance will take place in collaboration with the six WHO Regional Offices, which have a central role in implementing accreditation systems in collaboration with the WFME network of the six Regional Associations for Medical Education.

Local needs will determine whether the full WFME Package or parts of it are used.

The following components are included in the assistance package:

- Access to relevant WFME documents
- Provision of relevant material. This includes schemes for the self-evaluation process
- Plans for programme design and reports with general recommendations developed by the WFME Office
- Consultancy by WFME Advisors depending on specific needs and requests
- Provision of site visit teams
- Final reports including study evaluation and recommendations
- Assistance – on a continuous basis – in all matters related to quality improvement and recognition/accreditation of basic medical education (access to a WFME web-based “helpdesk”)

### **Value of the programme**

Conducting an institutional self-evaluation process of medical schools is generally experienced as a positive event having lasting consequences for necessary reforms and renewal of the educational programme of the institution. Including review and counselling by external experts can further enhance this process.

Conduction of an accreditation process according to the WHO/WFME Guidelines could lead to international recognition of the institution and its educational programme.

In the future, it is intended that information about the results of such accreditation processes is included in the planned WHO Health Professions Database, which is going to replace the WHO World Directory of Medical Schools.

### **Conditions**

WFME is a charitable, not -for-profit organisation. Therefore, participation in the development of an accreditation process will depend on financial resources provided by the involved institutions.

The process of establishing accreditation systems has received high priority by WHO and necessary funding could be sought through the biannual national agreements between national governments and WHO or other sources.

The package costs will depend on the concrete project requested and the practical conditions for conduction of the assistance from WFME.

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