

World Health Organization (WHO)

MetMUNC XLIX

Topic: Access to Healthcare During Pandemics

Chairpeople: Brian Lee and Jake Atkin



**World Health
Organization**

When looking at all the pandemics, epidemics, and diseases that have plagued humans throughout history, one of the most vital factors which determined the speed at which these crises ended is access to healthcare. Going all the way back to the Native Americans who died by tens of millions due to viruses and bacteria brought by European settlers, these indigenous peoples had zero access to any kind of healthcare or preventative measure against the onslaught of foreign viruses which would have drastically reduced the number of individuals who succumbed to disease. Looking at the present day, COVID-19 has played a huge role in everyone's lives starting from the beginning of 2020. While many countries were devastated because of the virus, many others hardly felt the effects, one such country being South Korea. One of the key reasons these countries bounced back so well was because of the extent to which their citizens were able to access healthcare systems.

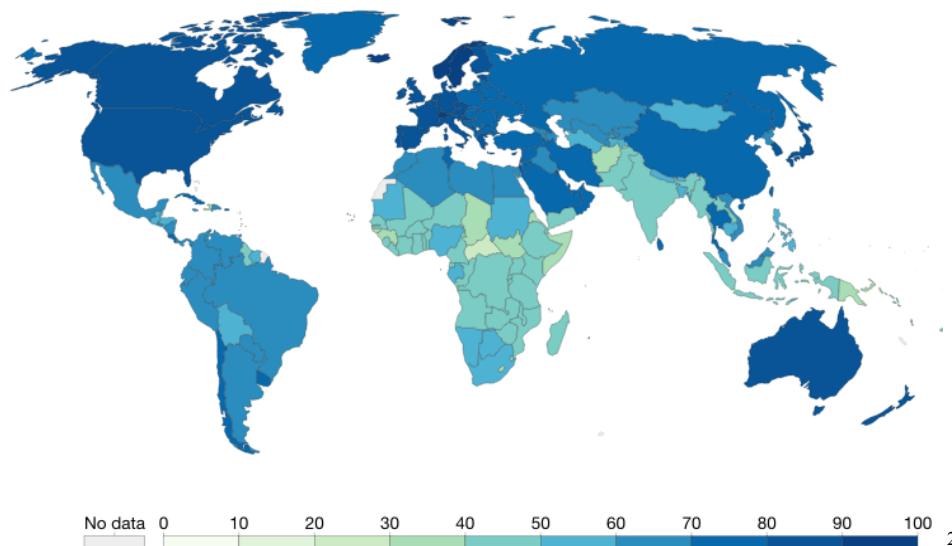
What is Access to Healthcare

Accessing healthcare is really just three steps: Gaining entry into the healthcare system (i.e. insurance), accessing a location that has healthcare, and finding a healthcare provider which you can trust. Some reasons that can prevent people from obtaining healthcare include high cost,

lack of insurance, and lack of services or culturally compatible care¹. However, the largest reason

Figure 1: Healthcare Access across the world

The Healthcare Access and Quality (HAQ) Index is measured on a scale from 0 (worst) to 100 (best) based on death rates from 32 causes of death that could be avoided by timely and effective medical care (also known as 'amenable mortality').



¹ <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Access-to-Health-Services>

² <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/healthcare-access-and-quality-index?time=1990..latest>

that prevents healthcare access on a nationwide scale mostly is due to a lack of funds which creates a lack of research, resources, and employment. Looking at Figure 1, it is easy to see that countries with high GDP per capita like the USA, Canada, Italy and Australia have amazing levels of healthcare systems which results in their low mortality rates. But in the face of pandemics like the current COVID-19 pandemic, it became quite evident that there were needs for health reforms internationally. Now this isn't to say that all countries were in danger of collapse due to a neglected health system, there were some countries who stood among those that were able to combat the Coronavirus successfully.

Taiwan

Being able to successfully fight off the Coronavirus includes three different aspects: healthcare management, political response, and financial policy response. All of these different aspects, when properly assessed and managed, allows citizens to properly access healthcare when needed and receive the treatment they require. Taiwan was able to tackle all three components which shows in the fact that they only have 477 cases and 7 deaths even though they neighbor the original epicenter of the virus, China³.

One of the most important reasons it was able to fight the virus off so efficiently was because instead of shutting off its economy in an attempt to slow the virus like other countries, it quickly closed borders, banned the selling of surgical masks, used mobile tracking to ensure that those in quarantine stayed that way, and most importantly, provided complete public access to



public healthcare in highly populated areas, places with large amounts of foot traffic, and businesses⁴. This allowed business to keep running smoothly and kept their economy intact. Also, their testing centers are rapid, pretty much free, and at every single service, there is a strict face mask policy as well as people who check your temperature before you ⁵ can even enter⁶. The access to health care items at Taiwan are much more advanced than other places as well,

Figure 2: Taiwanese man demonstrating mask tracking software

with the government developing software which tracks which stores nearby have medical supplies (i.e. masks, hand sanitizer) and how much they

have left (Figure 2)⁷. Taiwan's efforts helped to give full health access to all citizens and the results clearly reflect this as well.

South Korea

South Korea came into the current pandemic aggressively and prepared. They had already faced serious disease related issues such as MERS and because of this, already had plans in place to combat any kind of pandemic that may come their way. Right when word of the virus began to spread in the beginning of 2020, the first thing that South Korea did was create COVID-19 tests by the thousands every single day⁸. This is because their government had realized from past problems that the fastest way to wipe out the virus is to find who even has it in

⁴ <https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>

⁵ <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.straitstimes.com%2Fasia%2Feast-asia%2Fcoronavirus-taiwan-to-make-surgical-masks-available-online-as-part-of-its-mask&psig=AOvVaw0W8jAwKcgkbyRVSGtpp11b&ust=1597358434284000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CA0QjhxqFwoTCICN5oPelusCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD>

⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/15/how-taiwan-beat-the-coronavirus.html>

⁷ <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/15/how-taiwan-beat-the-coronavirus.html>

⁸ <https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>

the first place. This allowed every single person in Korea to have access to tests that quickly and efficiently put those who were infected into quarantine⁹.

Another large reason why citizens in Korea were getting the treatment they needed is because Korea completed its goal of universal health insurance coverage. In 1976, Korea made it its mission to provide universal health coverage for all of its citizens by the year 1989¹⁰. In fact, many other countries have done the same like Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, etc.¹¹ This makes citizens more willing to go to their healthcare providers than other countries like the US where many have to pay astronomical sums just for a checkup. The culture that a country creates around its healthcare system can make or break their country's attempt at stopping a pandemic as people are more willing to seek help from those who don't empty out their wallets¹². That is why another problem that delegates must solve is the problem of the stigma that is centered around healthcare.

Past Pandemics

Looking at past COVID-19, there were many other pandemics that also forced countries to change their policies to provide healthcare for those who needed it. One such pandemic was the Ebola Pandemic that started from West Africa. In December of 2013, the Ebola Virus appeared and as a result, 11,000 people died with a majority of those people killed being located in Africa¹³. One of the greatest problems wasn't the actual treatment of the victims but the ways that these victims were able to obtain

⁹ <https://www.statnews.com/2020/06/30/taiwan>

¹⁰ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.18.000000>

¹¹ <https://www.internationalinsurance.com/healthcare>

¹² <https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4900>
%20here,manifest%20in%20patterns%20of%20

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6020>,the%20most%20difficulty%20accessing



treatment. Especially in Africa, many people were unable to receive proper treatment to combat their already fatal illness. This led to far more deaths than there would have been if there were systems in place to handle these kinds of situations quickly and efficiently. Out of Africa, most of the victims came from Libya where over 4,800 people fell victim. When families from Libya were surveyed by scientists, it was discovered that in Urban areas, only 20-30% of families were able to obtain any kind of access to

Figure 3: Overcrowded Medic Camps in Congo

healthcare when it was needed and in

rural areas, only 70-80% had any access. Not only was healthcare limited at this time for Ebola victims, loss of healthcare was especially prevalent for patients who required prenatal care and emergency services¹⁴. So not only do delegates need to solve the problems of healthcare for pandemic patients but also for those with other needs. Just because there is a pandemic does not mean that every day illnesses won't vanish.

Problems with Healthcare

While there are many successful countries that manage their healthcare and resources well during pandemics and other health crises, their methods would not fare so well in others. This is something that delegates must keep in mind when deciding how healthcare issues should be solved while staying true to their country's views. In South Korea, one of the reasons that the government was able to create such an enviable pandemic control system was because the citizens were willing to surrender some rights that other country's citizens would never think of even if they were in a similar situation.

¹⁴<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5590567/#:~:text=In%20urban%20areas%2C%20only%2020,the%20most%20difficulty%20accessing%20care.>

South Korea as well as Taiwan are very digital countries that utilize technology to the fullest in regards to health. One of the ways that they took advantage of this system during their COVID-19 crisis was by tracking the phones of citizens to make sure that they were abiding by the laws that the governments set down on quarantine. South Korea even went as far as to track the past activities of all citizens who were suspected to have the virus¹⁵. This meant that every single train ride, convenience store, gym, and house that a victim may have visited with their viral incubation period was immediately known by the government who then proceeded to block off these areas and sanitize them. Pretty much, the Korean government was given full access to everyone's digital records. In Taiwan, your health records are made public to every single hospital so if you are found sick or showing any kinds of symptoms, all hospitals would know¹⁶. This is where this can become a problem in other countries. In South Korea and Taiwan, their leaders President Moon Jae in and President Tsai Ing-wen respectively became immensely popular with their citizens because both took swift action which saved the people and kept the country running smoothly. However, if other national governments such as the USA's or France's asked citizens to give them full access to their digital records, this would not go over with the people. It is up to delegates to find out the middle ground and decide how to best handle the problem while staying true to their country's views.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE-cA4UK07c>

¹⁶ <https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>

Questions to Consider

- How has your country handled the current pandemic?
- How is health insurance issued? Governmentally? By private companies?
- How has your country handled previous pandemics?
- What is healthcare culture like in your country?

Helpful Links

1. <https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5590567/#:~:text=In%20urban%20areas%2C%20only%2020,the%20most%20difficulty%20accessing%20care.>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE-cA4UK07c>
4. <https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4907#:~:text=Healthcare%20organisational%20culture%20>
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5590567/#:~:text=In%20urban%20areas%2C%20only%2020,the%20most%20difficulty%20accessing%20care.>

6. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/15/how-taiwan-beat-the-coronavirus.html>
7. <https://time.com/5851633/best-global-responses-covid-19/>
8. <https://www.statnews.com/2020/06/30/taiwan-lessons-fighting-covid-19-using-electronic-health-records/>
9. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.8.2.24>
10. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>