

Indigenous languages: a challenge or an opportunity in the achievement of universal healthcare in Kenya

One of the four main agenda for Kenya as a nation is the achievement of universal healthcare. An assessment of the level at which this has been implemented reveals that Kenya is facing challenges in fully implementing universal healthcare. Health professionals need to communicate with patients because good communication builds trust between doctor and patient and produces more effective practice. Failure to communicate strains the relationship, leading to ineffective practice. One of the main obstacles that may lead to failure in communication is differences in language and culture between the doctor and the patient. However, regardless of the cultural background of the patients, doctors must strive to facilitate communication with patients. Majority of the people to whom universal healthcare is to be trickled down to in Kenya speak indigenous languages as opposed to English and Kiswahili, languages that the doctors speak. Effective communication occurs through a language that the communicants understand best. Doctors, in Kenya, understand English and Kiswahili best, while their patients understand Kenyan indigenous languages best. So, what language should be used in universal healthcare endeavors? This shows that the main challenge facing the implementation of effective healthcare system and intervention in Kenya is the language of discussions. This paper argues that the achievement of effective and sustainable universal healthcare in Kenya can only become possible through the use of indigenous languages as languages of discussions. The paper takes a critical look at the role of Kenya's indigenous languages in achieving universal healthcare goals as an opportunity and not a as challenge.