



HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES

- THE BACKBONE OF HEALTH SERVICES

Health technologies range from the tongue depressor to magnetic resonance imaging equipment, from blood transfusion to emergency surgical procedures.

Health technologies are everywhere.

From the simplest of health care systems to the most advanced. In rich and poor countries alike, they form the backbone of health services.



Yet access to health technologies is at the same time one of the most distinct differences between rich and poor countries - far more so than access to technologies associated with basic medical education. Young medical doctors educated in Bangladesh may have been taught by the same or virtually the same textbooks as their colleagues educated in Great Britain. After their graduation, thanks to internet access, they probably read the same medical journals and continue to read the same kind of medical literature. And the most important factor for this is access to health technologies. But the preventive measures, diagnostic procedures and therapeutic interventions they are able to offer their patients are a long way from being of the same magnitude and variety.

Strong health systems invariably rely heavily on access to and use of health technologies. Together, they form a dense mesh throughout the health services into which they are interwoven. A strong mesh of health technologies is one of the most fundamental prerequisites for the sustainability and self-reliance of health systems.

Essential health technologies actively supported by EHT:

- **Blood transfusion safety**
- **Blood products and related biologicals**
- **Diagnostic imaging**
- **District hospital surgery**
- **Laboratory services**
- **Medical devices and equipment**
- **Transplantation services**



Health technologies are essential when they:

- Meet basic needs for health services
- Have been proven to be cost-efficient
- Are evidence-based

Health technologies are evidence-based when they meet well-defined specifications and have been validated through controlled clinical studies or rest on a widely accepted consensus by experts

Health technologies are solutions to health problems

Health technologies are not developed as an end in themselves and should never be promoted as such. They evolve or are invented as solutions to perceived health problems and are initially evaluated and applied for that purpose.

As experience in their use accumulates, health technologies may come to be used, either directly or after slight modifications, to address many other problems than those for which they were initially developed. The strategic use of technologies with multiple applications has become one of the most cost-efficient tools in the creation of strong health systems.

The use of each technology calls for carefully evaluated procedures and the availability of well-trained personnel. Some technologies are inherently safe, but the vast majority are not and require systematically established quality assurance and quality control measures if undesired effects are to be avoided in their application.

Indeed, for many technologies, it is desirable to ensure that any adaptation coordinate under national legislation and their application under supervision by regulatory authorities.

The mesh of technologies that countries in transition can afford obviously cannot be as dense as that of a developed country. But if the elements that make up the mesh are carefully chosen, a country may still be able to offer its citizens a safe and reliable health service to its citizens, even where resources are limited. The basic operational frameworks that EHT has established define such a level for the above aspects of access, use, safety and policy. This is the level of health service WHO recommends its Member States to reach as an important milestone on their road towards development.

Over the last four years, perhaps the greatest achievement of EHT has been to provide norms, standards, guidelines and training material that match a substantial number of the elements that are now included in the Basic Operational Frameworks. These products form the basis for inputs to capacity building projects that WHO can offer in response to requests by countries for help in meeting the requirements defined by the Frameworks.



*Department of Essential
Health Technologies*
World Health Organization
Geneva 27, Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 791 4836
E-mail: eht@who.int
www.who.int/eht