

WMA leader calls for international co-operation in the fight against COVID-19

A warning that now was not the time for egotisms and nationalism in the fight against Covid-19 has come from the World Medical Association.

Speaking at a ceremony in Vienna, where the WMA was today (Sunday) presented with an award honouring physicians around the world for their fight against the pandemic, Dr. Otmar Kloiber, Secretary General of the WMA, stressed the need for international co-operation.

‘Together we have been able to work on strategies to mitigate the pandemic’s consequences and develop therapies and vaccines. Alone, no nation would be able to cope; no scientist would make the break-through, no doctor could provide the necessary care. Cooperation, international cooperation is the key. And as we progress together, we have to share together. To leave no one behind, no frail person, no frail state. Now is not the time for egotisms and nationalism’.

His final message was to all his fellow citizens: ‘You can help your doctors, nurses, and other caregivers: Reduce contacts, maintain distance, wear masks, follow hygiene rules, and most important: get vaccinated. This is our best and only chance to get back what is worth calling a “normal life”’.

WMA President Dr. David Barbe said: ‘Physicians have demonstrated their professionalism by willingly placing themselves in grave personal danger by caring for patients with COVID-19 – often under less-than-ideal conditions. Untold tens of thousands have become ill and thousands have died as a result of their commitment to their patients and society.

‘Physicians have been vocal advocates for their patients and their colleagues in calling for adequate personal protective equipment, improved access to hospital care, equipment and life-saving treatments, rapid deployment of vaccines, and responsible social policies to reduce the burden of disease, save lives, and bring an end to this devastating pandemic’.

Dr. Kloiber also criticised governments for short-sighted cuts in health care spending, which was now leading to ‘a deadly payback’ of many deaths and damaged economies.

‘Stronger health care systems are better than weaker ones. Universal health coverage is even more critical in times of pandemics. High-quality health care accessible for all requires proper investment, meaningful financing, and resilient reserve capacities. Over the past years, we may have made some savings in streamlining the health care systems for strict cost-efficiency. We have even squeezed some health care systems to the minimum with austerity measures.

‘These have been short-sighted economic strategies, which have led to a deadly payback with so many lives lost and tremendous damage to our economies’.

The Golden Arrow Award was presented to the WMA at the 18th Vienna Congress. The award recognises the achievements of people for their life’s work and of institutions for their social relevance. Previous winners include several Nobel Laureates, as well as former Presidents of Israel and South Africa. The award was the highlight of the two-day Congress, held under the patronage of the Chancellor of the Austrian Republic. During the Congress international medical and scientific experts were discussing life after the pandemic.

Tributes to the medical profession were paid by several speakers. Václav Klaus, former President of the Czech Republic, said: ‘I would like to thank doctors all over the world for their services and hope that they all will hear about this thank you from the heart of Europe’, while Dan Shechtman, Nobel Laureate and Vice Chairman of the award advisory board, said ‘Doctors are part of our life infrastructure. They are there when we need them. And we need them often. The medical profession is at the forefront of the war on the virus. For us, for our health and our freedom.’

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